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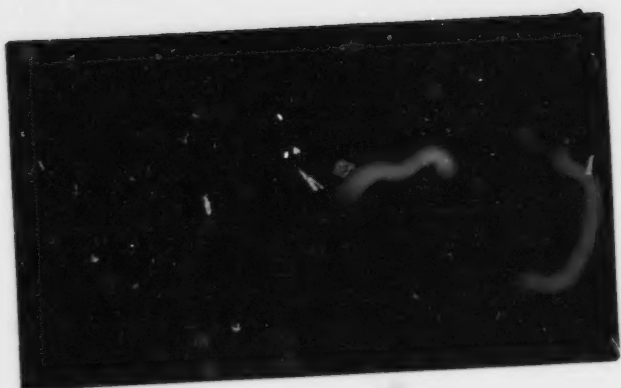
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**FEMALE PERPETRATORS OF
SERIOUS OFFENCES**

NO. 1986-16

87-05679/



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This working paper was prepared in 1986 on contract for the Research Division, Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada, and is made available as submitted to the Ministry. The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

This working paper is available in French. Ce document de travail est disponible en français.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to express our gratitude to the women that we interviewed as well as the various agencies that contributed to the preparation of this study.

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Summary

This study deals with a subject about which little has been written: women who commit offences against the person. In fact, because of its quality and quantity, delinquency among women has never been perceived as a serious problem. Researchers have tended to focus mainly on problems which have seemed most threatening, widespread and visible. Therefore, they have usually concentrated on male subjects. Consequently, few studies have been done that deal directly with women who commit serious offences and the offences themselves.

Nevertheless, in Canada in 1984, 6,613 out of 63,001 women (ie. 10.5%) were accused of offences against the person, a percentage that is nearly the same for the Urban Community of Montreal. Compared to men, women account for approximately 9% of the total number of persons accused of offences against the person.

At the present time there seems to be a willingness to fill the gap in our knowledge of female offenders. The question of violent criminality among women is also drawing interest. However, the few studies that have touched upon this topic have focused almost exclusively on the problem of violence in the family and especially on women as victims of this violence.

In the present state of knowledge, we deemed it wise to gather material that was broad in scope as well as personal. This was done through meetings during which women were able to express themselves freely, except for some topics that we wished to exclude. Deliberately excluded from this study were family crimes, crimes of passion and infanticide since these cases seem to be due to very different factors and circumstances.

Based on reviews of their past that the subjects were invited to make, this study shall attempt to identify the various stages in the personal and delinquent life of women accused of serious offences. We shall attempt to draw a portrait which takes into account the unique as well as the more general aspects surrounding the commission of the offence.

Methodology

For this study we used an interview questionnaire that included factual as well as open questions, and we met nineteen women in interviews that, on the average, were two hours in duration. These subjects had been accused of robbery, involuntary manslaughter, attempted murder or kidnapping; 8 were in an institution, 2 in a half-way house and 9 on parole. Out of 19 women interviewed, 11 were 25 years old or under.

Findings

The majority of the women came from large families (four children or more) and live in an urban environment. Their socio-economic status is lower middle-class with expectations on both ends. Most of the respondents had bitter memories of their family life and described it as a place where the members communicated very little with each other. Eight adolescents ran away several times when they were 12-13 years old. While the family environment does not reflect an ideal climate, the majority of the subjects encountered no models of delinquency within their immediate family.

Eleven adolescents were school drop-outs: six at the secondary I or II level, and five at the primary level. Given these facts, it is not surprising that only six women had part-time jobs between the ages of 12 and 17.

At an early age, they already associated with fringe groups involved in various illegal activities (petty theft, receiving and concealing stolen goods, selling drugs, etc.). At the same time, the women discussed in this study tried all types of drugs from alcohol to medications and everything else they could obtain (LSD, glue, heroin, cocaine, etc.). By their own admission, one of their main preoccupations was to obtain money for drugs. Therefore, they worked as dancers, "barmaids" and prostitutes, participated in drug trafficking and stealing, and when their

earnings were not enough, they practiced more than one of these activities at the same time.

The transition from adolescence to adulthood was not accompanied by any visible sign. The respondents generally frequented the same environment, came into contact with persons who were better known by the police, committed more serious offences, and organized themselves better. The women continued their nocturnal life in their continuous quest for money. They had difficulty seeing themselves employed in so-called conventional jobs because of their lack of training and/or because their lifestyle is somewhat incompatible with a minimum wage.

As far as their interpersonal relations are concerned, they received little moral or physical support from their associates. The women continued to dream of and wait for romantic love to come their way. While waiting for their love, they experienced many romantic adventures and deceptions.

While nine of the women brought at least one pregnancy to term, only three had planned it. In spite of their efforts, their personal and social situation did not improve at all over the years. Those who were accustomed to secondary roles continued to remain so during their offences. Those who appeared to be more independent, on the other hand, succeeded in establishing themselves in the world of crime.

The account that the subjects in this study give of their delinquency differs considerably from the official penal profile. Their's is an invisible sort of delinquency. The subjects in this study generally began with a minor infraction. The delinquent profile varies with the individual. Three of the respondents began when they were so young that they do not even remember the first offence; they are under the impression that they have always done it. Two respondents began when they were adults.

Differences are quite apparent between those who were sentenced for involuntary manslaughter or attempted murder and those who were apprehended for robbery. For the subjects in the first group, delinquency is limited to two or three types of infractions. None of the women in this group had been involved in thefts through break and entry, or prostitution. Those in the second group (ie. robbery), began much earlier, their rate is higher, and they display a greater variety of crimes and a constant search for more profitable and less risky offences.

The two most common types of offences among the majority of the subjects are simple theft and trafficking in drugs. Usually, theft brings in little money, and occasionally only a few hundred dollars. The women felt more at ease in selling drugs. This activity enabled them to obtain drugs and to reduce their debts with a minimum of

risk. Two subjects, however were exceptions to selling based on need and supply. They had a territory which they defend and they sell to accumulate large profits.

For eight respondents, the violent offence for which they were included in this study was their first offence of this type and for three others it was the second. For the majority of the women interviewed, therefore, violence is not habitual.

We were also able to establish that the vast majority of women do not have a female model of delinquency, and that they also display a certain lack of ambition. In fact, since they do not have a model of their own, and since they are excluded from the world of male big-shots, it is not surprising that they do not aspire to dominate the crime scene. Therefore, they do not refine their methods, do not extend their network, and do not contemplate extreme acts.

With respect to the specific offence for which they are interviewed, 10 women actively participated in planning the offence. Twelve of the 16 thefts perpetrated were committed very soon after the idea was accepted and therefore without serious planning. The women rarely operated alone, and when they worked with men rather than with women, their role was generally less important. The women in this sample, however, preferred to work with male accomplices.

Most of the women were arrested immediately after the offence. The sentences vary from six months to seven years, the average being between two and three years. Most of the

women feel that they have been knocked about in a rough world. Few of them are able to make plans for the future. They find it difficult to decide what to do in order to avoid repeating past mistakes both in terms of interpersonal relations and job training. Moreover, whether they are working or are on welfare, their financial situation is precarious because of their many drug related problems.

Conclusions

The analysis of the accounts given by the women interviewed for this study cannot, of course, be applied generally. However, the data presented here do show that violent offences do not occur by chance but it would be an exaggeration to speak of a criminal career in the sense used to describe some delinquent behavior among men, which may be more specialized and professional. The term "criminal career" might loosely apply to some women in this study, but only to refer to the adaptation of one's lifestyle to the offences committed.

This adaptation is facilitated by a number of factors. For example, a large number of the women interviewed come from families living in difficult circumstances. This predisposed them to problems in social adaptation, and it has left its marks. The early separation from a school environment was often accompanied by a deep desire for freedom while living at home. Therefore, they experienced a twofold uprooting: from the family and from school. Given

this environment, the women in this study had great difficulty resisting the inducements and encouragement to commit offences.

Very few of the women, however, participated in or committed violent offences on a regular basis. Even for those who commit more frequent robberies, this type of activity constitutes only a small part of their delinquency. The circles that they frequent, largely dominated by men, most often relegate them to accessory roles. Moreover, they sometimes feel "obliged" to overcome their hesitation and be willing to act as accomplices in order to maintain good relations with their associates.

Therefore, an analysis of the interviews shows that these women live in difficult social and economic conditions, and play a secondary role or have a lower status within the world of crime. To this dismal picture one must add the broader aspects associated with the status of women in general. They are poorly trained for the labor market, are poor, and sometimes are heads of families. The women offenders who have experienced incarceration have not come out of this experience better prepared for employment. Fundamental attitudes such as self-confidence, independence, a willingness to work, and the management of spare time were never developed.

For the most part, the women offenders who committed one or more violent offence are not a serious risk to society. In those cases where they are imprisoned, they could benefit from frequent leaves so as to take advantages to the various services offered by the community and thus become accustomed to frequenting such organizations.

This study has enabled us to confirm that women involved in violent offences live in a criminogenic environment by habit. In retrospect, it also confirms that they have few options open to them because of handicaps connected with their social and economic condition, and that the patterns that they adopted in early adolescence trapped them in a way of life from which it is difficult to escape.

Introduction

This study deals with women perpetrators of acts of violence; crimes considered grave by society. More specifically, it deals with the personal history and delinquent behaviour of 19 women who committed robbery, involuntary manslaughter, attempted murder or kidnapping of a person other than a family member or lover. Among other things, we asked the following questions: who are these women? How did they handle adolescence and adulthood? How did they come to commit an offence that is considered serious by society? What place does criminality against the person occupy in their life? Was it an accident? A passing error? A premeditated act which is in keeping with their lifestyles? How are they perceived in the criminal environment in which they circulate? Are there any events (such as contacts with the penal system) or other types of encounters that have had an effect on their criminal orientation?

While many questions may be asked on this topic, few answers are available. The very small number of women involved in this type of activity, and a certain tendency in society to see women as soft and passive, have helped to shift the attention of researchers toward other social problems that seem more widespread or threatening. Nevertheless,

the question is of interest. Indeed, it is precisely because of the small number of women involved in offences against the person that we should understand them better. Are they different from other women who take up more traditional types of delinquency (prostitution, simple theft, etc.)? What is their role during the perpetration of these offences? From what we know of their operation, is there reason to expect that their number will increase or reach some "dark figure"? The information cumulated here should shed some light on these and many other questions.

The present study is based on interviews with 19 women. Their common denominator is that they pleaded guilty to a serious offence, that is a crime committed with the use or threat of physical violence, with or without a weapon, regardless of the aim. It should be noted that by serious offence we mean what is also currently known as violent offence or crime against the person. During the interviews, we questioned them on many aspects of their lives and delinquency. The material collected through this retrospective look at events is presented under three headings.

The first has more to do with their personal development. Under it are described their development within their family, at school, their aspirations and personal interests that led them to adopt unusual values. It also covers their experiences as adults, the criminal environment in which

they circulated, the expectations and deceptions that they experienced in their interpersonal relations as lovers and mothers, their method of securing their livelihood and their level of satisfaction.

Secondly, we shall focus on the development of their criminality by emphasizing the conditions surrounding their delinquency, and especially the serious offence for which they are presently serving a sentence. We shall end our description of their observations with their perception of themselves as women perpetrators of offences against the person and with their plans for the future.

Before reporting the data collected, we shall review the literature on the subject so as to better identify the problem. This will be followed by a description of the methods and procedures used in analysing the data.

CHAPTER I

Review of the literature and the problems

A. FOCUS OF STUDIES ON FEMALE DELINQUENCY

A review of the literature normally should take stock of our present knowledge concerning women perpetrators of serious offences, the development and nature of their delinquency, the influence of contacts with the penal system, and everything directly related to the question under discussion. This objective, however, is difficult to realize because very little information is available on these aspects. The most recent empirical study dealing most directly with one of these topics, that is the methods and conditions of female delinquency, goes back 15 years and, although based on an analysis of the files of delinquent perpetrators of serious offences, it yields only very limited results.¹

Why have so few studies focused on this phenomenon? One of the reasons is that researchers in criminology have been mainly interested in problems which seem most threatening to society, and which are most widespread or visible. Both from a psychological and sociological perspective, attention has been focused on male subjects because the number and extent of their activities have drawn more attention. It is undeniable that delinquency varies significantly according to sex (Hindelang et al., 1981).

¹ Ward, Jackson and Ward, 1969

Also, because of its volume (Suval and Brisson, 1974) and its nature, female delinquency has never been perceived as a serious problem.

This perception of female delinquency has kept researchers from being interested in the development of unlawful activities among women, something which should be relatively easy to trace because they are apparently limited to a few minor acts, such as prostitution and simple theft. Rather, researches have merely focused on explaining differences in the nature of women's criminal activities.

Thus, since the end of the nineteenth century, some have sought to explain the apparently more limited and different sort of participation of women in crime on the basis of their biological makeup, eg., less physical strength (Quetelet, 1842); passive sexual organs involving the learning of dissimulation and thus creating the illusion of a less extensive criminality (Pollack, 1950). Then came the psychological explanations which maintained that unlike men, women committed offences because they lost control over themselves, because of emotional problems (Konopka, 1966), because of an inadequate adjustment to their sexuality, or because of their dual role of mother and wife or the lack of an opportunity to take up this role (Konopka, 1966; Davis, 1937).

According to Groman and Gaugeron (1979), since the 1960's, changes in the place and role of women in society have made it possible to seriously consider other theories

such as the theory of differences in opportunities, or other social factors hitherto considered important for men (Cowie et al., 1968). Thus, some authors have acknowledged that women also have real needs, such as economic necessities, which act as inducement to delinquency (Jurik, 1983; Bartel, 1979).

Among the studies and reflection generated by this new wave of interest, few were undertaken to deal specifically with female perpetrators of serious offences or acts of violence. At best, some have devoted a few sentences to them in passing when referring to so-called traditional delinquency (shoplifting, prostitution, passing fraudulent cheques) or male delinquency. What little research that directly touched upon this subject has been confined almost exclusively to family violence: homicide and assault (Totman 1978; Suval and Brisson, 1974; Rosenblatt and Greenland, 1974). It considers the household as the most frequent place where women commit violence because of their social role of mother and wife². Also, researchers have focused on the home in order to analyze certain psychological characteristics. For example, Sutker et al. (1978) have found that compared to women perpetrators of non violent offences (crimes against property, drugs), women

² "The victims are precisely the people and part of the social institution which defines woman's primary role and give her her identity! (Totman, 1978, p. 15).

perpetrators of homicide show little involvement in a delinquent lifestyle, limited insight, and low levels of interpersonal anger. This data may seem surprising, however, if one considers the fact that 90% to 95% of homicides committed by women take place against a close person (husband, child, lover), that this act generally represents the only criminal act committed in their life, and that it seems to be the result of factors which are different from those associated with homicide committed during attempted burglary or robbery, it becomes more comprehensible. To the extent that this study is aimed mainly at delinquency among strangers, the research on homicide among closely related persons seems less relevant.

Therefore, there are few studies focusing directly on female perpetrators of serious offences and on their offences in particular. Admittedly, a statement to the effect that a female perpetrator of offences against the person is disturbed and that she plays only a passive and secondary role in these offences just as she does in social life, would not particularly stimulate further research.

While it is difficult to rely on earlier studies, useful information can be drawn from writings which have touched upon related subjects. Thus, in the pages that follow, we shall discuss the following topics in turn: the role of serious female delinquents within the whole field of female criminality, the evolution of this delinquency, various related aspects, and finally some topics more

directly related to our subject, namely the attitude of the penal system, the role of women in the criminal environment and the technical aspects of the offences committed by women. We shall end this review of the literature with a description of the problem and the procedures used in carrying out our research.

B. NATURE AND NUMBER OF SERIOUS OFFENCES COMMITTED BY
WOMEN

Let us now describe the main offences for which women are accused in Canada and, more specifically, Montreal.

The women represented in the following two tables were drawn from official statistics on delinquency in Canada. The "dark figure" for criminality makes it difficult to evaluate the extent to which the official figures on delinquency among women are representative. However, it can be assumed that the more serious an offence is, the greater the probability that it will be reported (Hindelang and Godfredson, 1976) and that the forces of law and order will try to discover the perpetrator(s). Therefore, there is a greater probability that the type of offence covered in this study reflects reality more than shoplifting both because of the former's visibility and its referral to the criminal justice system.

It should be pointed out that the following tables refer only to those accused under the Criminal Code excluding all other regulations or laws concerning fields too remote from the present subject.

The Canadian statistics and those of the Urban Community of Montreal give a similar portrait of female delinquency. Let us describe its main characteristics.

- Crimes against the person do not constitute a large portion of female criminality since only 10.5% of indictments brought under the Criminal Code are for such crimes. Moreover, if one were to take into account indictments brought under other laws or regulations connected to the Criminal Code, such as the Narcotic Control Act, this percentage would drop considerably.

Female criminality is concentrated in minor acts, with nearly two-thirds of the offences against property falling under the heading of thefts of \$200 or less.

- The majority of crimes against the person (86%) are assaults. Also, nearly 60%-70% of these assaults do not seem to have resulted in serious injuries or bodily harm.

Table 1
Offences under the Criminal Code for which adult
women were indicted in Canada in 1984

	Number of women indicated	As a percentage of total offences	Women indicted as a percentage of all adults indicted
Violations of the Criminal Code - TOTAL	63,001	100%	15.8%
Crimes against property	43,734	69.4%	20.6%
Crimes against the person	6,613	10.5%	9.6%
- homicides plus attempted murders	140	0.2%	10.9%
- assaults	5,715	9.1%	10.6%
- robberies	519	0.8%	7.7%
- other (sexual crimes and kidnapping)	239	0.4%	3.6%
Other	12,654	20.1%	10.8%

Source: Table - Canadian Crime Statistics, 1984. Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Catalogue 85-205, Annual.

Table 2
Summary of crimes under the Criminal Code in the
Urban Community of Montreal in 1984

	Number of women indicted	As a %age of total offences	Women indicted as a %age of all adults indicated
Violations of Criminal Code - TOTAL	3764	100%	16.7%
Crimes against property	2594	68.9%	22.4%
Crimes against the person	374	9.9%	8.8%
- homicides plus attempted murders	9	0.2%	8.3%
- assaults	311	8.2%	9.6%
- robberies	54	1.4%	5.8%
Other	791	21%	12.5%

Source: Table 2 - Urban Community of Montreal, Annual Report, 1984, p.97
1. This percentage (9.9%) is broken down as follows: 83.2% (assaults),
14.4% (robberies), 2.4% (homicides and attempted murders)

- Approximately 58% of the women accused of robbery³ allegedly perpetrated their offences without an offensive weapon, compared to 45% for men.
- In Canada, women represent approximately 16% of all adults indicted of a Criminal Code violation. However, they account for 10% of all adults accused of violent offences.
- In the United States, in spite of a different statistical representation of the data (according to arrests and not indictments), the data is similar. Between 1973 and 1979, the majority of their delinquent activities consisted of petty theft, fraud and "falsification", while offences against the person accounted for only 10% to 15% of all their delinquent acts.

Therefore, offences against the person do not constitute a large portion of female delinquency. At most, they are apparently a type of conspicuous behaviour which is more the exception than the rule. Men accused of offences against the person account for 15.6% of all offences under the Criminal Code, while for women the figure is 1.6%. This clearly suggests that this type of behaviour is an exception. Some perpetrators of these crimes, however, said that they noticed an increase in the participation of women in this type of delinquency, while others foresaw a decrease in

³ Robbery: theft committed by using violence, threats of violence and/or weapon.

such acts. Who is right? Do these acts continue to be the exception, or is the profile of female delinquency undergoing major changes?

C. THE HISTORY OF FEMALE DELINQUENCY

What are some of the qualitative and quantitative changes that female delinquency has undergone over the years?

Contrary to Canadian crime statistics, American crime statistics have been the subject of numerous longitudinal studies. Since we were also interested in looking at changes in female delinquency we referred to many American authors who have studied crime statistics with the hope that by comparing their, at times, divergent findings we might come closer to the truth. Given the similarity between the two cultures and the fact that American delinquency is comparable to that in Canada, we believe that we should be able to obtain an accurate picture of the evolution of North-American female delinquency.

Let us now look at the changes that some authors have observed, namely Simon (1979)⁴, Harris and Hill (1981)⁵, Steffensmeier (1978, 1980a)⁶, and Steffensmeier and Cobb (1981)⁷.

⁴ Analysis of statistics from 1953 to 1974

⁵ Analysis of statistics from 1953 to 1977

⁶ Analysis of statistics from 1965 to 1977, 1960 to 1975

⁷ Analysis of statistics from 1934 to 1975

The number of women who were arrested for an offence has increased considerably during the last two decades, and this increase has surpassed that of men. Thus, while in 1953, the proportion of women arrested compared to men was 1:8.54, by 1974 it had become 1:5.82 (Harris and Hill, 1981). This rise was due mainly to the large increase in the number of women arrested for offences against property. Thus, for this category of offences, in 1953 the ratio was one woman to 10.42 men compared to one woman to 3.44 men in 1977.

While there has been a considerable increase in the number of offences against property, small changes have also been observed in the number of crimes against the person⁸.

Steffensmeier and Cobb (1981) as well as Harris and Hill (1981) have found that women are now arrested for violent offences more often than they were in the past, although this is limited mainly to assault. Moreover, Steffensmeier (1980a) found that their rate of increase is more or less the same as that of men and therefore the man-woman ration has remained relatively stable. Thus, while in 1965, women represented 9.9% of the adults arrested for violent crimes, in 1977 this percentage was 10.8%. Simon shares this view and notes that between 1953 and 1974 men experienced a larger increase than women for two of the crimes studied here, namely robbery and aggravated assault.

⁸ Includes: homicide, serious or simple assaults, robbery, and firearm violations.

Also, according to Simon, the proportion of women involved in homicide and aggravated assault has remained so constant during the past 20 years that the author anticipates that if this rate is maintained, in the future women will commit fewer homicides and aggravated assaults.

In spite of the small differences in the findings reported in these three studies, the situation may be summarized as follows: in spite of an increase in their overall criminality, in the past 10 or 15 years women have not become more violent. Their larger presence in crime statistics is due mainly to the fact that they are most often arrested for offences against property, mainly petty thefts (especially shoplifting), fraud (mainly false cheques and credit cards) and "falsification" (often false identification)⁹.

Does this mean that there has been a change in the type of delinquency committed by women or merely a lower tolerance for these offences and therefore more arrests? The situation is not as simple as this, however. In fact, many factors may be responsible for these changes or this stability, depending on the case. The identification and relative importance of these factors is presently the subject of lengthy debate and controversy within the scientific community. Let us see how various authors explain the evolution of female delinquency and the influence that these various factors have had on it.

⁹ Steffensmeier, 1978.

D. FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHANGES IN FEMALE DELINQUENCY

Two factors have drawn particular attention in the contemporary literature: the growing presence of women in society and the attitude of the penal system with regard to women.

1. The role of women in society

As early as 1975, Simon noted that in recent years important changes have taken place in the role and involvement of women in society. Thus, as new opportunities open to them, women have more choices or are encouraged to develop outside the family. This may involve a more active participation in a different environment from what they had known before. Their freedom and their growing presence on the social stage has perhaps increased the possibility for them to commit offences and to become more visible. The fact that, especially since 1967, violations against property (fraud and petty theft) have dramatically increased, that only these offences have experienced a significant increase rather than the so-called traditionally female offences (prostitution and child abuse) coincides with the greater awareness and visibility of women outside the home.

As far as crimes against the person are concerned, Simon (1975) believes that the new social role of women will lead to a reduction in homicides and aggravated assaults by women because the new role will be accompanied by a reduction in the feelings (worthlessness, frustration) that,

until now, may have motivated these actions. On the other hand, Simon raises the possibility of an increase in the number of robberies if women cannot bear their new economic responsibilities due to inadequate employment or sources of income.

In spite of some differences, Adler's opinion is in some respects similar to that held by Simon (1975). Adler (1975) believes that as women change the opinions they have of themselves and as the opportunities to perform the same acts as men increase, they will become increasingly involved in crimes that, until now, have been committed exclusively by men. In his statistical analysis, Adler already detected an increased participation by women in robberies and burglaries. Other researchers, however, analyze this problem differently.

Steffensmeier (1978) does not believe that the Women's Movement has greatly influenced their delinquency because, contrary to what Simon (1975) argued, the increase in female delinquency has been constant since 1960; therefore, it was under way before the influence of the Women's Movement really began to be felt. According to Steffensmeier, the proportion of violent crimes committed by women increased very little because, among other reasons, as argued by Clinard (1942), social changes are reflected more in crimes involving the acquisition of property than in crimes against the person.

With respect to offences against property, he believes that their increase is not due to a new type of delinquency linked to their employment because women do not yet have access, for example, to jobs enabling them to commit serious economic crimes. The crimes that they do commit continue to be an extension of women's traditional roles. As women become increasingly responsible for purchases and the handling of their budgets they have more opportunities to commit offences such as shoplifting and/or petty frauds.

According to Smart (1979) and Crites (1976), the Women's Movement has had little influence on female delinquency because the typical profile of a female delinquent has nothing in common with the new opportunities offered to women by this Movement. These women are poor and under-educated, and therefore do not have access to jobs permitting them to commit economic crimes. They are also responsible for their own livelihood and that of their children, and their condition does not improve with time. Their traditional role as mother and wife responsible for keeping the house and looking after the children in the evening rather than enable them to participate in men's activities (Bartel, 1979), also denies them the opportunity to commit many types of offences (Steffensmeier, 1980a), especially since it is usually on such occasions that crimes are planned.

The difficulty of clearly establishing the impact of social changes (as they related to women's roles in society) on female delinquency as we have seen has given rise to conflicting opinions and has led some researchers to identify different factors that may account for changes in female delinquency. For instance, some of these researchers are of the opinion that the increase in the number of offences committed by women may be due to the operation of the criminal justice system. Let us see how this might be possible.

2. Attitude of the Criminal Justice System

In view of the fact that our image of delinquency is greatly determined by the workings of the penal system, the apparent increase in the number of offences committed by women could be partly explained by changes in its operation: greater police effectiveness (Heidensohn, 1968); a wave repression leading one to believe in a crime wave (Jones, 1980); and, changes in the gathering of statistics (Rans, 1978).

Generally speaking, the attitude of the courts and the police with respect to women keeps a number of controversies alive and it seems that depending on how that attitude is expressed, it can greatly affect the official portrait of female delinquency. Thus, according to Steffensmeier and Cobb (1981) and Krohn et al. (1983), what we have seen has been more an increase in arrests than an increase in real delinquency. To a great extent, this may have been due to a

more repressive attitude on the part of the police and the courts with respect to women, especially since women now enjoy less preferential treatment than in the past.

While it is somewhat taken for granted that police and judicial systems adopt different attitudes according to sex, the nature of this difference is not very clear. In addition, it would only be partly dependent on the type of crime committed. Let us see more specifically how this difference in attitude is expressed in court, in police departments and even with respect to the victim.

2.1 The attitude of the court

If one focuses on the attitude of the court, one will find that some authors (Steffensmeier and Kramer, 1982; Moulds, 1980; Armstrong, 1977) have concluded that the perception of women as more submissive, more passive, less dangerous and more amenable to rehabilitation, results in a more favorable attitude toward women than towards men in all crime categories. Thus, in their study on homicides, Farrell and Swigert (1978) noted that women are clearly less penalized than men because of the perception that the courts and society in general have of them and of the circumstances that had to surround this act: "Women accused of murdering men are not only viewed as outside the popular conception of violent behaviour but are further advantaged by the application of such an imagery to their male victims" (p. 574). For Wilbank (1982), that possibly means that women are perceived as being more mentally disturbed and therefore

eliciting a more sympathetic attitude from the court. This perception of their mental health is clearly evident in the opinion of one psychiatrist who, speaking of two women who made attempts on the life of the President of the United States, noted: "The fact strongly suggests that both wanted to attract attention more than murder the president: Both women are making suicidal gestures and women are far more prone to suicidal gestures than men (Woodward and Malamud, 1975).

However, other authors interpret this phenomenon differently. As far as offences against the person in general are concerned, Bernstein et al. (1977) believe that if one takes into account such factors as the use of firearms, violence, and resisting arrest, the fact of belonging to one sex or the other does not particularly affect the various phases of the trial (eg.: the severity of indictments). Women may seem to benefit from special treatment, but in fact their acts are generally less serious and less violent than those committed by men (secondary roles rather than instigators); therefore, to some extent justifying their more lenient treatment (Steffensmeier, 1980b).

According to Armstrong (1977), this protective or paternalistic attitude on the part of the court may result in a disadvantageous treatment of women, as when the court rules that their need for protection, care or supervision

demands it. Such cases are particularly frequent such as when adolescents, who have not committed any specific offence, are placed under "protection" by the court in rehabilitation centres for juveniles.

Several authors¹⁰ have observed that women are more susceptible to being treated more or as severely as men for crimes against the person than for offences against property (acts for which they are treated more leniently). This punitive attitude with respect to offences against the person is probably due, among other things, to the fact that they may have committed an act which clashed with the court's expectations concerning the social role that women should play.

Given these different points of view, therefore, the treatment accorded by the court to women as well as the elements that may affect the treatment of women are not clear. The attitude of police departments, which is much less documented, also causes some confusion. At this level, it seems that the type of offence committed has much less influence on a police officer's decision to proceed with an arrest, for example, than one might be led to believe.

2.2 The attitude of police departments

The discretionary power of police officers with respect to the decision of whether or not to arrest a female perpetrator of an offence against the person or an act of

¹⁰ Nagel and Hagan (1977), Simon (1975a), Chesney-Lind (1978) and Nagel and Weitzman (1971)

violence is much less extensive than for minor thefts. Nevertheless, police officers do have some scope to manoeuvre with respect to their behavior during arrest, the writing of their report and, to some extent, the choice of charges laid against the suspect. According to Defleur (1975), who has studied the decisions and attitudes of police officers during arrests concerning drug cases, the behavior of police officers and their decision as to whether or not to proceed with an arrest, depends to a considerable extent on the woman's cooperation, politeness, non-resistance to arrest, and whether the woman conforms to a stereotypical image (ie. she has been forced by a man, shows concern for her children).

The less the subject cooperates, the greater the chance that the police officer's report will be severe. But while police officers probably have less choice as to whether or not to arrest a female perpetrator of homicide, one might expect that the factors mentioned by Defleur also influence how police officers treat female perpetrators of crimes against the person during arrest.

Another factor that may to some extent influence how women are represented by the statistics has to do with the victim's attitude.

2.3 Attitude of the victim

As reported by Hindelang (1979), Hindelang-Godfredson (1976) and Parisi (1982b), the probability that an offence

will be reported to the police by the victim is to a great extent determined by its seriousness (physical injury, heavy financial loss, use of weapon). The more serious the offence, the greater the chance that it will be reported and its perpetrator accused. Since women tend to concentrate on minor acts and commit less violence than men while committing their offences (Parisi, 1982b), on first sight it may seem that women run a smaller risk of being reported to the police than men. Hindelang (1979) has, in fact, found confirmation for this tendency in his study. He found that, in general, victims of less serious acts are more prepared to report men than they are women. However, as the seriousness of the act increases, women run a slightly greater risk of being reported than men, especially by male victims. This reaction may be due to the fact that, like the courts, these men believe that the women in question have performed acts which go against their traditional social role.

What, then, is the conclusion to be drawn from this data? It is difficult to determine the real changes that have taken place over the years with respect to female delinquency. The statistics provide us only with a fragmentary picture because it is also subjected to a series of external influences whose character and importance are the subject of much controversy. Thus, while nearly all the authors consulted agree on the fact that women are dealt with differently than men, both within the penal system and by the victims, the significance of this difference is yet

to be determined. Some women seem to be subjected to less punitive treatment, while the opposite is true for others who in turn see themselves more severely penalized. Moreover, it seems that there are many factors that may help determine the type of treatment to which women are subjected. To date, however, there is no unanimity with respect to their number. Indeed, it would seem that they affect each case differently. Even if the current attitude of the penal system and victims largely remains to be clarified, it seems reasonable to believe that changes in attitude on the part of police officers, the courts and victims with respect to female delinquents may have a considerable influence on how they are represented in the statistics, and thus give the impression that there has been a change or an increase in female delinquency as Smart (1979) would have us believe.

Given the fact that it is difficult to draw an accurate picture of female delinquency and its evolution to date, it may be useful to compare their criminality to that of men, or more specifically to identify the role that they play in the world of crime. This should provide us with a qualitative rather than a quantitative clarification of their criminality.

E. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF CRIME

Compared to men, women are relatively absent from the crime statistics regarding offences against the person.

While the portrait of female delinquents, in general, is somewhat linked to minor offences and subordinate roles, can one assume that women accused of armed robbery, for example, are exceptional because they have succeeded in breaking into and being accepted in a world dominated by men? The answer seems to be no. According to Steffensmeier (1980a), a study of recent and past cases, biographies and various other sources of information on female professional or organized criminals show that these women are subjected to restrictions imposed by men. Block (1977), in his study on organized crime, notes that the social world of criminals is dominated by men and women do not play any social role enabling them to reach positions of prestige because they are generally limited to sexual roles or to looking after children: they lack daring and endurance, are less trustworthy than men ("unless she is your women"), are too emotional, and their feelings make them indiscrete. They are also seen as being subject to bouts of jealousy, rancor and suspicion which may ruin even the most well-laid plans; and they lack physical force (which may be useful for the protection of the group or to meet potential difficulties). Moreover, women are seen as needing protection, so why expose them to unnecessary risks? (Lucas, 1927c; Steffensmeier, 1980b, 1983).

Given their opinion of women, these men are more interested in seeking the complicity of other men because they see no advantage in working with women, both in terms

of getting recognition for their abilities and for advancement in the world of crime (Steffensmeier, 1983). Over the years, the names of some front-rank women have drawn some attention, but according to Steffensmeier, these are exceptional cases. The role of women continues to be that of accomplices to the men who plan crimes and who are the central figures in the perpetration of those crimes. This subordinate position is confirmed by other authors who have studied the files of female perpetrators of burglaries and robberies (Ward et al., 1969, Simon and Sharma, 1974). On the other hand, it should be pointed out that in terrorist organizations women have easier access to high ranking or commanding roles (on this subject see Herc-Reldan, 1983).

Similar observations are usually made for adult or youth "gangs". Miller (1975), in his study on the violence of "youth urban gangs" in 12 American cities, and Campbell (1984) who studied young and adult female members of various New York gangs, found that gangs, group fights, and serious delinquency, are usually handled by male youths and it is they who are responsible for them. Girls do not constitute a serious component of the criminal problem presented by the groups, and the delinquency of a few rare independent girls' gangs is clearly less serious than that of boys' gangs. Generally speaking, girls' groups are only branches of the boys' groups, and for the most part the girls are connected to the boys by family, love or camaraderie.

Even if women do participate in fights and use weapons (knives, firearms) they largely remain subject to the rules set by the men, and to their very traditional role expectations (mother-wife). Of course, the rigidity of traditional values may vary from one group to another. For example, one group may tolerate the participation of women in meetings, while another may not even grant them the right to speak in circumstances where the gang's very existence is at stake.

The fact that women do not tend to form groups among themselves or to join groups that are very active criminally (Miller, 1975) could be due to the lack of a delinquent sub-culture supporting women, the lack of criminal models that might encourage emulation, and their small number which may increase the difficulties of joining men's groups and be recognized for other than sexual reasons (Steffensmeier, 1983).

Looking at these points of view for a moment, it would seem that the situation has not changed at all over the years because as early as 1965, Morris (1965) considered this lack of cultural support and stronger social disapproval of girls' delinquency as important factors, if not reasons, for the lower rate of delinquency among girls. Campbell (1984) nevertheless did note some changes as to the organization of women in gangs. For example, the female side of the gangs that she observed tended to increasingly live on its own. Those girls tended to form a group with

its own rules and practices, which allowed the girls to participate in common activities and to develop solidarity. At the same time, and perhaps as a result of those changes, their concerns also changed and they no longer clung only to sexual competition or attraction. Aware that their status in the gang also depended considerably on the other girls, some of them sought to occupy or protect important positions within the female branch. This attitude was similar to that held by the men. They no longer fought against other girls only because of jealousy but also to avenge their honour and to respond to insults.

Like Campbell (1984), Giordano (1978) studied the influence of peers on juvenile delinquency and found that when committing delinquent acts, girls receive more approval from their female solidarity, especially when they encounter the resistance of men who show little appreciation for their activities, whether delinquent or not.

In spite of the changes noted by Campbell, the general role of women in the world of crime does not seem to have changed with the advent of the Women's Movement. Delinquent women still lack independence, make few important decisions, and play only a secondary role when committing offences. They have not defined for themselves a model of personal success, and continue to identify with male models (eg.: tomboys).

While the role of women in the world of crime turns out to be relatively traditional, it is interesting to analyze its operation in relation to the offences committed by women. Do they play only the role of accomplice or do they also assume responsibilities for planning and committing the offences?

F. WOMEN AND THEIR OFFENCES

Very little work has been done to study empirically the modus operandi of women who commit serious offences. On the other hand, several authors have presented findings obtained through statistical analysis and court, prison and police records. One has to go back to 1969 to find a study dealing specifically with serious offences. In their attempt to answer fundamental questions concerning the violent behaviour of women, Ward, Jackson and Ward (1969) consulted the files of 832 women who were imprisoned in 1963 and another 200 women who were imprisoned in 1968 for homicide, robbery, assault, drug-related violations and burglary. These women were inmates at the California Institute for Women and at the Minnesota Women's Reformatory. What is being presented are mainly their findings.

1. Type of accomplice and the role of women in the perpetration of offences

The type of accomplice varies according to the offence committed. Thus, in murders and assaults, women act alone or with someone whom they know very well. In 50% of the cases, it is a husband or a lover, and in the other 50% it

is an acquaintance or a male or female friend. Ward et al. (1969) noted, however, that their precise role in such crimes is not very well understood.

The choice of accomplices and their role in burglaries and robberies have been the subject of conflicting interpretations. Simon and Sharma (1974), as well as Ward et al. (1969), believe that women have a greater tendency to commit these acts with acquaintances than with intimate friends. Simon and Sharma (1974) and Steffensmeier (1980a) maintain that during robberies and burglaries women rarely act alone or as "leaders". Rather, they often act as assistants to more competent men. In fact, Steffensmeier (1983) believes that women participate in crimes committed by groups mainly in a secondary capacity which is linked to their sexual role:

... use of women to conceal or camouflage criminal activities because women are viewed with less suspicion, as less threatening or dangerous and can "get over" easier than a man. Their ability to get information to conceal stolen goods or to gain entry into targets of crime ... (p. 1012, Steffensmeier, 1983).

Parisi (1982a) does not share this opinion. On the contrary, she believes that for all offences, the traditional image of women as secondary accomplices to men is wrong. Like Young (1978), whom she cites, she notes that when a group is set up, the women tend to work with other women as often as with men, if not more often.

Among adolescents, Giordano and Cernkovitch (1979) found that out of fifty girls who had committed robberies, 56% belonged to a mixed group, 22% were with boys alone, and 16% only with girls. For these authors as well as for Giordano (1978), the strong presence of mixed groups would suggest that girls play a more active role in delinquency than the literature would suggest. However, Steffensmeier and Steffensmeier (1980) note that very few girls are arrested with boys for the perpetration of violent crimes. This might mean that their participation is less active and more secondary or that the police officers adopted different attitudes toward them at the time of arrest.

2. Premeditation

Only Ward et al. (1969) have touched upon this aspect and they note the difficulty of establishing whether or not a offence was premeditated. In their sample, in spite of the fact that they were unable to determine whether or not there was premeditation in 30% of the cases, they obtained the following results:

TABLE 3

Planning of offences

in %

	Planned	Not Planned
Homicides	21	40
Aggravated assaults	33	31
Robberies	63	7
Burglaries	78	2

According to them, what is most obvious about the robberies and burglaries committed and organized by women is that, for the most part, they were poorly organized. The decision to act seems to have been the result of a more or less conscious involvement in an offence that was quickly conceived by a member of the group. These offences generally present considerable risk and small profit. It is difficult to determine the extent to which the results obtained by Ward et al. (1969) reflect reality, particularly since only women whose offences were very poorly planned so as to result in their arrest were included in the study; while the others probably never ended up in prison at all.

3. Type of weapon used

Although Simon and Sharma (1974) maintain that when committing violent crimes, women tend to use weapons other than firearms, Roseblatt and Greenland (1974), on the basis of Canadian statistics, and Totman (1978) concluded that the murder weapons most frequently used by men as well as by women are firearms. According to Ward et al. (1969), during homicides firearms are used as often as knives (or household weapons) (34% and 35% respectively). On the other hand, during assaults, knives (or household weapons) are the most common compared to firearms (49% and 29%). It should be pointed out that in Canada, in 1982¹¹, the most frequently used weapons by homicide suspects were sharp-pointed weapons

¹¹ Source: Homicide in Canada, 1982; Statistical Perspective. Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Catalogue 85-209 Annual, p. 85.

(eg.: knives or ice picks) (33.8%), firearms (22.5%) then beatings (21.2%). These data are closer to the conclusions arrived at by Simon and Sharma (1974). According to Ward et al. (1969) women use weapons less frequently during robberies (53% without weapons and 35% with firearms). This data is similar to that for Canada in 1982, where the figures are 52.6% without weapons and 19.8% with firearms.

Parisi (1982a) suggests that the sexual role affects the choice of the weapon used and that even if the reasons behind this choice remain unclear (eg.: to compensate for the lack of physical strength?) women tend to choose less deadly weapons than men.

According to Wilbank (1982), the reason why women choose other types of weapons may be the unavailability of, or their unfamiliarity with, firearms. This may often involve a more dangerous weapon or one requiring more physical strength or courage. This choice may also be linked to other factors such as cultural aspects which give men greater opportunity to familiarize themselves with firearms through hunting when they are young, pigeon shooting, or rifle practice -- activities which are much less appreciated or practiced by women.

An increase in the number of homicides committed by women could mean a greater availability of such weapons (Wilbank, 1982). This increase could also mean a decrease in the number aggravated assaults because rather than simply

wounding someone with a knife, for example, a woman using a firearm might kill much more easily. A greater availability of weapons could also simply result in an increase in the number of homicides and assaults because, according to Berkowitz and Lepage (1967), weapons not only make violence possible, but also encourage it.

4. Type of victim

The type of victim chosen varies with the type of offence committed. Thus, according to Ward et al. (1969), during robberies the victims are generally strangers (50% businesses, 28% unknown men). There seem to be few female robbery victims. In her analysis of the "National Crime Survey", Parisi (1982a) reports that for robbery, simple or aggravated assaults and petty thefts, in 85% of the cases the women chose other women as victims. The fact that in the most serious offences (aggravated assaults and armed robberies) 70% of the victims were women led that author to believe that women may tend to select victims who are weaker than themselves.

As far as homicides are concerned, there is consensus to the effect that the vast majority of victims are intimate friends or relatives (husband, lover, child) and that these acts are most often perpetrated in the family home.¹²

¹² Wolfgang (1958); Wilbank (1982); Rosenblatt and Greenland (1974).

Wilbank (1982) notes that the fact that today women are less confined to the home may not only account for a stable homicide rate but also for a change in the type of victim chosen.

Female perpetrators of homicides were often themselves victims of previous assaults by their victims (Bowker, 1978) and may have turned to the police for assistance several times. After the homicide, they have a tendency to remain near the victim and even to give them assistance, thus facilitating their arrest (Totman, 1978).

According to Ward et al. (1969), women often attack victims who are incapable of defending themselves (persons who are ill, drunk, asleep). This was the case in 42% of homicides, in 38% of assaults and in 44% of robberies. The reason they select such victims is because they feel they must be careful during the attack because of their lack of physical strength, because their victim is often stronger than they are, and not because they are more stealthy or malicious than men (they do use a direct method such as a weapon and not poison, for example) (Bowker, 1978).

The number of women who during homicides attack victims other than intimate friends or relatives is so small that they have not yet been the subject of any known study.

5. Use of physical force

According to Ward et al. (1969) to use physical force and agility means that a woman has fought with or has attacked her victim with her fists, a knife or some other weapon. According to this definition, then, killing at a distance with a firearm, poison or negligence, participating in a robbery without committing physical violence on the victims or not participating actively and physically in a burglary does not constitute an offence that would come under this category (ie. crimes involving physical force and agility).

According to Ward et al. (1969), the fact that women lack physical strength does not explain their almost negligible involvement in robberies and burglaries because, as shown in the table below, such offences in fact require much less strength and agility than assaults:

TABLE 4

Use of physical strength and agility

in %

Use of strength and agility	Homicides	Assaults	Robberies	Burglaries
Yes	43	59	22	12
No	51	39	71	74

This data, however, does not specify whether the majority of robberies and burglaries do in fact require little force or whether another accomplice (a man) is usually responsible for such tasks.

The difference between the force used during the perpetration of homicides and assaults may be partly explained by the fact that the perpetrators of assaults use firearms less frequently than perpetrators of homicide (29% and 34% respectively). Instead, they tend to use household weapons such as knives (assaults 49%, homicide 35%) which involve a more direct attack.

6. Justification for the act

How do women justify their acts? In spite of the large number of cases for which Ward et al. (1969) were unable to find a clear justification, their findings nevertheless do provide an interesting look at the main rationalizations that women make with respect to their acts. As far as homicides and assaults are concerned, their perpetrators said that they were in self-defence (22% and 19%), and felt justified in acting because of the extenuating circumstances in which they found themselves (24% and 31%). They considered this act an accident (homicide, 17%), or they found extenuating circumstances (assaults, 36%) such as drinking, provocation, and various psychological reasons for having acted the way they did. Even if, as Ward et al. (1969)

noted, that it is the perpetrators of homicides and assaults who have the most serious alcohol problems, few women used this excuse to limit their responsibility (5% and 11%).

While at first sight robbery seems to be an act aimed at the procurement of money, only 15% of the respondents gave a financial reason as the main justification. They pleaded innocent (16%) or said that there were extenuating circumstances (30%) relating to alcohol and to their psychological state (not specified), or they shifted the blame for their participation in such an act onto someone else.

7. Other points

- An analysis of the files of women accused of homicide, assaults and robberies led Ward et al. (1969) to observe that it is the latter who more frequently have a previous delinquent history compared to women accused of homicide. Moreover, women involved in the perpetration of robberies have a much more serious delinquent history than those involved in crimes against the person.
- Ward et al. found that it was the families of women accused of robbery that displayed the greatest delinquency. However, no comparison was made between the type of offence committed and the family structure in terms of broken homes, for example.

What conclusions can be drawn from this data on the offences committed by women? In spite of fact that our main source of information on this subject dates back some fifteen years, some points are partly confirmed or supported by more recent analyses (Wilbank, 1982; Simon and Sharma, 1974; Parisi, 1982a; Bowker, 1978). However, this information should be treated with caution because it has been drawn from secondary sources, that is, through the analysis of statistics or through the consultation of court or institutional records of women accused of such offences. Therefore, we are dealing with pre-processed information concerning only offences for which women were arrested.

While male perpetrators of robberies in particular have been the subject of many studies based on direct sources of information (ie. the men themselves), to our knowledge only female perpetrators of homicides were interviewed for this purpose. Therefore, it will be interesting to compare some of those results, as well as those on the role of women in the world of crime, with the data generated by our own analysis.

G. THE PROBLEM

At the present time there is a willingness to fill gaps in our understanding of female delinquents. This willingness has given rise to a series of studies dealing with various topics: the so-called traditional criminality of

women, adolescent delinquency, and the psychological, psychosocial and familial characteristics of delinquent girls. The question of violent criminality among women has also drawn some attention. However, the few studies that have touched upon it have focused exclusively on the problem of violence in the family and more specifically on women as victims of such violence.

The more specific question of offences against the person has been avoided for a long time for basically the same reasons that in the past may have justified the lack of studies on female delinquency in general, namely the lack of numbers. Female delinquents are, in fact, small in number compared to men. On the other hand, the data collected at the Tanguay House show that approximately 35% of the women who were imprisoned in July 1984 had committed offences against the person. This, of course, is explained by the fact that the more serious offences are punished more severely; in these cases by incarceration. We have very little information on these women. Social workers/agencies themselves may, in some cases, have precious information to offer. This information, however, is very fragmented and difficult to obtain.

Given this situation, we deemed it necessary to fill in some of the gaps. When we decided to make a contribution to the improvement of our knowledge on this subject, several approaches were available to us.

We could have undertaken an analysis of the court or institutional records in order to find descriptions of the crimes, the participation of accomplices, the types of sentences and previous histories. We could also have administered a questionnaire to a sample of women accused of offences against the person and thus collected information dealing both with factual questions as well as with attitudes or perceptions.

However, given our present knowledge, it seemed more useful to collect material that had some breadth and value by conducting interviews in which women could express themselves freely, as well as deal with a number of topics that we wanted to cover. We deemed it more useful to try obtain a global view of how these women approach life, of their values, and their personal and delinquent histories in which serious offences were committed, rather than to limit ourselves to a particular aspect of this phenomenon. We have listed some of the more specific questions below.

The frequent or occasional perpetration of such an act very probably depends on the accumulation of life experiences. Therefore, does such behavior reflect a particular mentality; a different way of going through life? How do these women see the world? What are the experiences or choices that may have guided them? When looking at their development, can one identify certain events and circumstances that may have influenced them? What is the criminal

history of a woman who commits serious offences? Why and how do they get involved in this type of delinquency? Do they act by choice, that is a voluntary involvement as part of criminal career, or is it an accidental act, a passing error? Does the fact that they committed crimes mainly perpetrated by men mean that they are different from women engaging in minor acquisitive delinquency? How are they perceived when they attempt to enter this male domain? Are they seen as accomplices worthy of trust or, as noted in the review of the literature, as women who are assigned only secondary functions often linked to their sexual role?

To obtain the desired information, we decided to use a qualitative approach, that is we met with the female perpetrators of offences against the person, but excluded female perpetrators of domestic crimes, crimes of passion, and infanticide because these cases seem to be due to very unique forces and have already been dealt with in many studies. Basing ourselves on their retrospective look at their careers, in this study we shall try to do the following:

- identify the various stages in the personal and delinquent careers of female perpetrators of serious offences;
- describe in greater detail some of the events or individuals that may have influenced these women to enter a life of crime;

- identify the emotions associated with these offences, as well as the more obvious motives;
- draw a profile which takes into account both the unique and more general aspects surrounding the perpetration of these offences;
- understand their ideas and feelings with respect to the intervention of the penal system as well as its apparent influence on their outlook.

We shall try to describe their point the view and their intentions without testing specific hypotheses. We shall investigate chronologically various aspects of their lives, and their perception of the world in order to better understand the origins of their serious offences. The main topics discussed are the following:

- family and school experiences;
- interests as adolescents, first plans for the future, introduction to life on the fringe and delinquency;
- adult environment, values with respect to interpersonal, love and work relations;
- emergence of self-disclosed delinquency, types of offences against the person, and penal experiences;
- return to delinquency and plans for the future.

This approach to these questions is not without its drawbacks. For example, it does not permit as deep an analysis as one limited to the investigation of only a

particular aspect. Since this is not a comparative study also involving a group of female perpetrators of more traditional crimes, we cannot claim to be isolating characteristics that are unique to female perpetrators of serious offences. The limited number of women interviewed, of course, does not permit us to draw generalizations. However, this approach does offer the possibility of describing a process; something that would have been more difficult to accomplish had we used a quantitative approach. To the extent that this study is apparently the first of its type, it could serve as a pre-test. The data collected constitute a sort of base on which other work may be done. In light of what was said in the preceding pages, it is clear that this study does not deal with the question of the treatment of, or services offered to, women accused of serious offences. This does not mean, however, that the observations made by the women interviewed cannot be used a guide when dealing with them.

At this point, it is useful to describe the procedures and the methodology used in conducting this study.

CHAPTER II

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the strategy that seemed the most adequate for carrying out this study was one which would enable us to collect factual information on some aspects, as well as comments and details by women who have committed serious offences. We also decided to interview a number of women involved in such offences. This was done on an individual basis with the aid of a questionnaire.

Since these women would be selected on the basis of the violation that they might have committed, one of the earliest stages in the research was to clarify what we meant by "serious offence".

A. WHAT IS A SERIOUS OFFENCE?

For the purposes of this study, the characteristics of a serious offence are the following:

- an act committed against a person through the use of physical and/or psychological violence;
- committed with or without a weapon;
- calls for a punitive sanction if it is made known to the police and comes under the Criminal Code.

After consulting the Canadian Code, we selected the following acts:

HOMICIDE

- including involuntary manslaughter and attempted murder
- excluding infanticide.

ROBBERY, namely:

- armed robbery
- any other theft involving threats of violence or the use of physical violence (example: beating someone to steal from him)

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT or any assault resulting in physical harm to the victim

THREATS OF VIOLENCE OR INTIMIDATION THROUGH VIOLENCE

- the risks of violence would have been very probable and serious if the victim had not complied with the demands

HOSTAGE TAKING, FORCIBLE CONFINEMENT, KIDNAPPING

ARSON with the aim of killing or injuring someone.

Since our attention was first directed toward women whose offences might be due to some involvement in a delinquent lifestyle, we stipulated the following two conditions:

- these offences must not have been perpetrated against a member of their immediate family (that is parents, children, husband, mistress or lover because this type of violence seems to have its own unique characteristics and often (as far as homicide is concerned) it represents an isolated act in one's life;

- the perpetration of offences must not be the result of psychiatric problems and, during the interview, the women must not show such symptoms.

And finally:

- although conscious of the fact that the type of crime committed is not necessarily indicative of the potential for violence, to us it did seem safer to consider their behavior as an indicator of their potential for violence;

- for the purpose of the interview, the women must be able to speak French.

While acknowledging the limitations of a definition, we adopted a framework which facilitated the use of concepts. Therefore, some criteria or acts may have been added to or deleted from our list. Overall, however, our choice was based on these parameters because we had to establish as precisely as possible the types of offences that we were interested in, and because these would in turn serve as the criteria for the selection of our subjects.

B. LOCATING THE CANDIDATES

In order to track down the women accused of such offences, we contacted penal and social organizations capable of putting us into contact with them. These organizations were the Tanguay and Gomin prisons, the Thérèse Casgrain half-way house, and the probation and parole offices of the Montreal and Quebec regions.

Telephone contact was first established with the persons responsible for these organizations to ask them if they could put us in contact with the female perpetrators of such offences through their intermediary agents or social workers.

At the same time, a document describing the research was sent to them. If necessary and if distance permitted, a meeting with the person responsible was arranged in order to maximize an understanding of the research.

For reasons of professional ethics, these intermediates generally preferred to obtain permission to divulge the location of the potential subjects before letting us know. After they agreed, the intermediates gave us their telephone number or suggested a meeting if the subjects were in prison. Out of some thirty women contacted in this manner, 16 agreed to meet us. Four other women were traced directly through the active files of the Quebec Parole Commission (Commission quebecoise des liberations conditionnelles (CQLC)) to which access had been granted. The records kept at the CQLC were first selected on the basis of whether we could meet with the candidate and the variety of serious offences committed, paying particular attention to the types of offences that had been least represented in our sample up to that point. Eight women were thus contacted by telephone and four agreed to be interviewed.

C. INITIAL CONTACT

At the time of the initial telephone contact with the subject, a number of points were clarified, particularly the confidentiality of the information gathered, and the anonymity and independence of the research team vis-a-vis

the penal process. Once the candidates had also been informed of the aims of the research and of the fact that we needed their cooperation, they were in a better position to give a more informed decision.

The interviews were all conducted by the same person and lasted between 1 1/2 and 3 1/2 hours each.

The women who were being detained were interviewed in the establishments where they were held, while the majority of the women on parole were interviewed at home (7) or in a public place (café (1), park (1), university (1)). Most of the interviews took place in a quiet and discreet place, conducive to the establishment of a fruitful contact.

D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Since we wanted to collect specific information as well as allow the interviewees to express themselves freely, we prepared an interview questionnaire (appendix) consisting mainly of open questions and a few closed questions. This instrument was partly based on those used for other descriptive research on criminality. It was constructed so as to permit an overview of the subject's life while clearly placing the emphasis on the development and characteristics of her delinquency as well as on its importance in the subject's life. Since this instrument was developed so that it could have broad application, the breakdown of the topics takes into account the chronological factor and it makes it

possible to quickly identify the questions concerning a specific aspect in the life of the subject. The topics are divided as follows: family of origin, activities as an adolescent, juvenile and adult relationships, employment, reflections on life and plans for the future.

In order to ensure the relevance of the questions, the consistency of their use as well as their validity, we constructed a chart showing each question and the information obtained through them throughout the interviews. This resulted in a slight modification of the instrument and addition of a number of questions on topics that had not been included before (eg. have you already tried to end your life?)

E. THE INTERVIEW

At the beginning of the interview, the subjects were again told of the context and aims of the research and were again reassured as to the total confidentiality of the information revealed. After a brief summary of the topics that would be discussed, they all preferred that we chose the topic with which to begin the interview. We therefore began with questions of a general nature (eg. social origins) in order to facilitate a good contact. The interviewer kept the conversation going remembering that she wanted to obtain certain specific information by discretely referring to the questionnaire to pursue a particular topic.

At the request of the majority of the subjects, the taking of continuous notes was preferred to recording because of the nature of the information conveyed and in order to ensure more freedom and trust. While the conversations were not transcribed entirely, the use of shorthand made it possible to collect a number of passages as spoken. Two interviews had to be reconstructed immediately after the interview because the interviewees preferred that no notes be taken during the interview. In nine cases, we were able to compare some of the legal information that we collected with the official information contained in the CQLC files. As a whole, the material that was made available from the two sources of information (interviews and court record or pre-sentence report) was comparable. This leads us to believe that our subjects were frank with us, something that may also apply to the information concerning their self-disclosed delinquency which is more difficult to verify.

As far as self-disclosed delinquency is concerned, we found that the women in detention seemed less prepared to relate these offences than those who were on parole. That may have been due to an element of distrust and a fear that their revelations might affect their obtaining parole if this information were to reach the relevant authorities. Some of the women interviewed who were on parole acknowledged that they did not feel threatened because nothing was

being recorded, while others said that they felt better now that they had had the opportunity to speak openly about such personal subjects. The coherence of the conversations with the interviewees and the emotions that they felt on some occasions lead us to believe that, in general, their statements conveyed a gratifying degree of honesty and sincerity.

F. ANALYSIS OF THE MATERIAL

Initially, the material collected was analyzed sequentially, that is according to each interview. This stage first consisted of summarizing the interview and then identifying topics or sub-topics which were unique to the interview. Once this was done for each interview, we moved on to another level in the analysis. This was to go through them cross-wise, that is to compare and analyze all the interviews jointly, in order to identify similarities and differences in the observations made and to make the appropriate connections thus facilitating a summary and synthesis of all the material.

G. DESCRIPTION OF THE SUBJECTS

Originally, twenty interviews were conducted. Only one was not kept for analysis purposes because the information collected was too inconsistent and impossible to verify through other sources.

Although we did not expect to select a representative sample of women perpetrators of serious offences with only 19 persons, special attention was paid in selecting them to ensure that they were as varied as possible with respect to their offences, place of origin (prison, half-way house, parole) and prior experiences. In spite of the precautions taken, we were still dependent on the women who accepted or refused to participate in the research, on what they were willing to say, and on the cooperation of resource persons in the agencies that served as intermediaries. Needless to say, all the women who accepted to participate in this study are known by the penal system. There may be others who may have perpetrated similar offences but who could not be formally checked. For reasons of availability, visibility and time limitations, it was not possible to include them in this research. The information collected, therefore, originates from women who were accused or found guilty of their offences.

The following information gives an idea of the sample's configuration.

1. Status of the women interviewed

All the women interviewed were serving sentences for having committed serious offences. Half were on parole (9), and the other were staying in an open (2) or closed (8) institution (prison).

2. Offences justifying an interview

Most of the women interviewed had perpetrated a robbery (11). The other offences were divided into involuntary manslaughter (5), attempted murder (2), and kidnapping (1). All other types of accusation such as conspiracy, and carrying a weapon are covered by the main accusation, so we shall not elaborate on them.

3. Length of sentence

For these offences, the women were serving sentences ranging from six months to seven years, the average being between two and three years.

4. Age of the subjects

The age of the subjects at the time of the interviews is broken down as follows:

TABLE 5

<u>Age of subjects</u>	
Under 21	3
21 - 25	8
26 - 30	3
31 - 35	3
36 - 40	2
Total	19

5. Previous legal and prison history

Although the great majority of the subjects were not experiencing their first contact with the penal system, it is interesting to note that five women had never appeared before an adult or juvenile court prior to committing their offence, not even for a minor offence. Out of the 14 women with a previous legal history, 10 had already been in an adult institution serving a sentence, and six had been in a juvenile institution.

Now that we have described the factual data concerning the sample as well as the procedures followed in the analysis, we may proceed with a description of the material collected.

CHAPTER III

Personal History

A. FAMILY BACKGROUND

1. Description

The majority of the women interviewed were raised in an urban environment and came from families that today would be considered large since 13 of them had four or more children.

The majority of the women interviewed grew up in their natural environment with their parents. Gilberte and Fiona¹³ were adopted at a young age and Fiona visits both her adoptive parents and her natural family. Apparently she was more influenced by the latter since she spends all her time there and since the nearness of her natural parents limits the adoptive family's influence:

They never tried to argue with me because they said that I was not their's and that if they beat me the neighbors would gossip. They didn't argue over me.
(Fiona).

Sylvie, Claire and Rita have parents who separated when they were very young. Therefore, for a long time they have had to bear with an unwanted step-father whom they know better than their natural father. However, they do not accept him as such, because they cannot forget that he is not their real father and as Claire put it, "they were not even married". Given this situation, they do not see with

¹³ For the sake of confidentiality, we have used pseudonyms.

what the right he can "order" them around, and so they refuse to submit to his discipline.

Such reserve regarding the new "parent" is understandable if one considers the fact that between the departure of their father and the arrival of the step-father, other men lived with them and ruled the roost:

When I was five years old, my mother met Jean, a man who quickly moved in with her and the rest of us for about five months. He beat my mother, and when he was angry he would turn off the electricity. He was really crazy. Having had enough of him, my mother got rid of him and quickly met someone else... (Rita).

With time, only Rita succeeded in becoming attached to her step-father, but that was years later, after he had proved that he could be trusted.

Rita and Danielle lived with a foster family for the same reasons that Fiona was adopted: poverty. Both feel that they were exploited and taken care of only for the money paid by the government. They complained of having been mistreated, poorly fed, and even beaten. Rita lived with the foster family for only a year, the time needed for her mother's financial situation to improve after the departure of her father. Living outside the maternal home has had a greater impact on Danielle because from birth until the beginning of adolescence she did not have a fixed address. When she was twelve she returned to her family home. Although she rarely lived with her parents, the

incestuous relationship that her father developed with her at that time disturbs her deeply. In addition to the fact that the family home offered neither affection nor the needed stability, she was the victim of sexual approaches by her father, as well as by her uncles and grandfather who tried to take advantage of her. She also said that this incestuous relationship made her sexually precocious. Physical violence and being forbidden to see anyone whatsoever outside the house, to take part in other activities, the frequent change of residence in order to avoid being discovered, in addition to being thrown out of the house before she was able to take care of herself, made it very difficult for her to integrate in society.

While not all our subjects experienced such terrible situations, for most of the women interviewed, the family was not a place conducive to personal development.

2. Financial situation

The average financial situation of the families might be described as lower middle class, with some on both extremes:

My parents have always lived on welfare.
(Stéphanie)

I was raised in a wealthy family. My father had a big business, forest lands, ... I had everything. I had a private seamstress, everything that I wanted.
(Jeannette).

In all cases, the fathers or those who took their place had the role of financial provider for the family. Most had

relatively unskilled jobs (day laborer, truck-driver, machine operator) while some held important administrative positions with companies (3) or owned a small business (2).

In spite of the fact that more than half of the fathers or step-fathers worked on a regular basis, a decent livelihood was not assured. Dependence on the sole provider made the economic situation for the majority of families fragile and unstable, and placed it at the mercy of a change or loss of employment, a separation or, as is often the case, on a penchant for laziness, drinking, gambling:

My second father did not work very hard. He let himself be served and drew unemployment insurance, and sometimes welfare. (Sylvie).

My father's salary, or what was left of it after he had finished drinking, was really not enough in spite of government assistance. (Jocelyne).

One day we were rich, the next he had lost all our furniture playing cards. We were accustomed to seeing the house unfurnished. (Fiona).

When a separation took place, the mother, who inevitably got custody of the children, was left in a precarious financial situation. This forced her to depend on "welfare", to find a poorly paying job or quickly find another companion on whom she could depend. As they became adults, our subject tended to follow the same pattern.

For those whose father or step-father did not hold a regular job, dependence on social services became a normal part of life: "Sometimes we lived on welfare, unemployment

insurance, or on his wage." (Charlotte). In spite of the precarious financial situation of many homes, only the mothers of three subjects entered the labour market to make ends meet because of a separation, a debt or threats from one's partner:

Until he was 57 years old ... it was his salary that kept our family alive ... My father beat my mother and the rest of us for more money. (Armande).

In short, a rather small number of subjects (3 to 5) seemed to have grown up in a family environment where money matters were not a serious problem. A precarious financial situation is often blamed on the father, and some of our subjects such as Charlotte found it revolting that she had to pay room and board to her parents from her early teens on:

In those days I hated my father because he drank all the house money even when he was not the one who earned it. He did not understand that it was I who was earning it and not him, and that it was his duty to earn it and not mine. (Charlotte).

This comment is just one of the many reproaches levied by the daughters against their fathers. In fact, whenever the speak of them, their conversation quickly turns to their negative aspects.

3. The Father

Whether he is the natural father, a step-father or someone living in, the subjects remember him as the one wielding supreme authority; he was the one who ruled at

home. If sometimes he seemed to delegate some authority to the mother, he still continued to control her:

My father was the real authority in the house. He was the one in control.
(Elisabeth)

When he was not happy with how one of us behaved he would ask my mother to handle it. He never said anything himself.
(Colette).

In other circumstances, the father may show no interest at all in such matters:

Since we were not his real children, he felt less responsible for us and left it up to our mother to discipline us. (Sylvie).

The methods used by the father to assert his authority and to discipline the children varied from "mild" methods (forbidding them to go out, sending them to their room (9)) to more "brutal" methods (beatings (10)) which bring to mind more the idea of family violence than educational methods. The father's violence was not confined to disciplinary matters. It may have broken out at any time, without warning and without apparent reason. In the majority of cases, it was directly linked to the father's alcoholism:

When he was drunk, however, my father was a violent man, unlike when he was sober. But he was always drunk, ... (Jocelyne).

The father's violence was directed at the mother and/or the children. In the case of Danielle's and Jocelyne's mothers, his violence was enough to send them to the hospital, or leave physical scars on the children: "I have

several scars due to blows with a knife or his fists." (Danielle). Such violence could break out at any time and left the daughters with feelings of anxiety, fear and powerlessness: "I was afraid, I feared my father because I never knew what state he was in." (Jeannette). For Charlotte, whether she would be beaten or not depended on her mother's ability to restrain the father, together with all the anguish that involved.

Even if for several of our subjects this violence was part of daily life and constituted the only exchange between father and daughter, they could not get used to it. Aware of the physical and relational damage caused by their fathers' violence, some tried to excuse it by attributing it to his alcoholism. For example, Claudine notes that when her father stopped drinking, he also stopped beating her and family relations improved. This, however, was not the case with Danielle:

I thought that my father's behaviour when I was young was due to the fact that he drank a great deal all the time. However, when he stopped drinking like a fish, his behaviour remained the same. (Danielle).

While problems of violence and alcohol affected only half of our sample, some frustrations were felt more widely by all the girls. For example, some girls felt that their fathers treated them differently from the other children in the family: they felt that they were less helped and less wanted:

My father always tried to help the other children when they had problems. I don't know why he never wanted to help me. (Gabrielle).

Far from being encouraging, and helpful in developing self-esteem, some of the fathers' remarks had a devastating effect, triggering self-doubt and a belief that they would turn out bad:

My father never stopped telling me that I would end up like my sister (committed suicide), that I was a lost case ... he always said that I should go back on the street because he didn't want to have anything to do with me and my problems. That disturbed me a lot. (Stéphanie).

Such comments suggest that they heard only humiliating prohibitions and criticisms: certainly nothing that encouraged a healthy relationship. This partly explains why there was no communication with the father, other than to ask for money.

When I was around 15-16 years old I began to hate my father. I didn't speak to him any more ... Why bother to speak to him if all you heard was nonsense? (Armande).

When I went to see my father, it was to get money or something. (Jeannette).

Aware that such an attitude on their father's part was abnormal, they felt disappointment, hatred and revulsion toward him. Before talking about their father's negative aspects, some also pointed out that he had some very good qualities. However, only four women gave a more positive assessment of their fathers. In these cases, the fathers

neither abused them nor were they alcoholics: "My father loved us very much. He was proud of us ... He never touched or struck us." (Gilberte).

4. The mother

The picture that the subjects give us of their mothers is altogether different, indeed in some respects they are shown to be the opposite of their fathers. In spite of obvious conflicts with them, the daughters felt closer and more attached to their mothers. There are a number of explanations for this. Since she did not work outside the home, her presence facilitated more frequent contacts. Unlike the fathers, in none of the cases is she believed responsible for physical violence against her children other than to occasionally discipline them. On the contrary, where there was violence in the family, she was a victim of the father's violence just like the children and she was also subjected to the orders and moods of the man of the house. The situation in which mother and daughter found themselves may have helped to develop some complicity of rapprochement between the two. We should point out that in some homes, the supremacy of the man over the women extends even to brothers:

... they (my brothers) did not hesitate to ask us (the daughters) to serve them and slap us if we refused. (Charlotte).

With some respect, the daughters felt that their mother was weak in letting herself be beaten and commanded by her husband, and in not being able to stop him hitting her children:

My mother did not know how to defend herself from my father's blows. She was fragile. (Jocelyne).

Thus, when her mother decided to divorce him, the daughter thought:

Finally my mother has woken up.
(Jocelyne).

Their mother's weakness was usually due as much to her personality as to her health. Several of them (6) were frequently depressed or ill. When young, the daughters did not necessarily understand their mother's attitude and in some cases developed both a sense of guilt and anguish toward her behavior:

With my mother, who drank all the time, and who screamed or cried over nothing, things were not always pleasant. We asked ourselves what we had done to make her behave this way. We did not understand.
(Gilberte)

For Jeannette and Jocelyne, having a mother who was unable to assume her responsibilities because she was sick or depressed, meant that they had to assume responsibility early on (role of substitute mother). This prevented them from going through a "normal" adolescence. As for the three daughters who had a more assertive, and even authoritarian, mother, their degree of satisfaction is not much better. In fact, at least half of the subjects feel that their mother performed her role poorly, that they could not count on her to satisfy their need for affection, for someone to

listen to them, and support them in case of need. In spite of her physical presence, they feel little loved and believe that they were appreciated for things other than themselves:

My mother was always interested only in my money. When the two of us quarreled she was ready to make up only if I gave her some money. (Stéphanie).

They would have liked to have been left alone less, and been with their mothers more: " ... I reproach her for having been a flirt, for having neglected her children and gone out." (Fiona). Of course there were some justifications: a large family, the lack of time, and the lack of support from the father; although these are not totally convincing. Nor is alcohol an excuse, because only three mothers abused it.

The dissatisfaction felt is more comprehensive if one considers the needs of some daughters vis-a-vis their mother. They expected unconditional love from her, a well-developed sixth sense that can intuitively feel their needs:

If I need something I can go and see her, but if I am stoned or if I were to ask to lend me some money she refuses to see me ... She does not really love me otherwise she would love me as I am. (Claire).

When I called my mother, I hoped that she would have understood how I felt (depressed) ... she should have understood from the tone of my voice that I needed help, that I was suffering. But no. I took it very hard. (Manon).

With respect to the other half of the subjects who had better relationships with their mothers, their relationships were not intimate or peaceful. These adolescents however did believe that in difficult moments they could count on their mother's support.

5. Attitude towards the family

By examining the views that the women have of their parents, we get a sense of the family environment in which they grew up. This environment may vary from Stephanie's: "Our's was one of hatred and violence," to Elisabeth's "We had good parents, the other (children) were very happy ...". But on the whole, most still have bitter memories of their family life, some recall particularly tragic moments such as the suicide of a mother or sister, or the discovery of a father's past crimes.

In general, there was little communication between the members of the family. The daughters knew little of their parents' activities, their past stay in prison or in a mental hospital. The less the parents shared information, the less the children were interested in talking about their own activities, their feelings, their plans: " ... I found that my parents did not care about how I lived my life." (Claudine). It is quite understandable not to want to communicate with someone who beats and neglects you, with someone you do not trust or who does not understand you. "I do not feel that they understood me, therefore I discussed very little with them." (Georgette).

However, even among those few women who said that their parents were adequate, ready to help them when in need, and with whom they could talk, the girls developed a strong impression that their parents did not really understand their real needs and wants. They developed this impression in the early teens and it went hand in hand with a need to escape the family environment and try new experiences.

For several, to be understood as a teenager meant being allowed to do as they wanted, without restraint, without listening to their parents' advice or sermons, and living a life different from their's:

Our parents gave us everything we needed
... I only wish that they understood a
little better that our needs were different
from their's when they were the same age as
us. (Gilberte).

It is not so much a financial independence that they wanted but the freedom to come and go whenever they wanted and to see whomever they wanted. Like all adolescents, they were experiencing a clash of generations. The vagueness of their needs made the situation that much more painful: on the one hand, they wanted responsible parents who were interested in what they were doing and in their well-being, which meant some control, and on the other they wanted total freedom. This need for independence often made them unwilling to submit to the discipline that their parents wished to impose upon them:

I did as I wished ... They did not have a
choice with me, they had to deal with me in
the evening when I came home. (Manon).

5.1 Running away

Also, when confronted with a prohibition or a punishment, wishing to live their lives their own way, they challenged their parents openly, disobeying them or leaving for a few hours or days to express their dissatisfaction, independence or to instill a sense of guilt in their parents:

... when (my mother) argued with me, I simply went to stay with a friend of mine and returned a few days later. Then she would not dare argue with me because that would make her feel as if she wanted to chase me out of the house. (Sylvie).

I ran away because I did not want to obey my parents' orders, for example, to come home at a given hour, while the older ones were allowed to come in later. (Claudine).

Eight teenagers ran away several times when they were 12-13 years old and even younger. During their absences, which usually lasted a few days or more, their activities were limited to staying with friends, where they slept and with whom they "tripped" by using small amounts of drugs:

I did nothing special other than take part in a trip ... (Diane).

What about those who did not run away? They did not feel the need to run away and, like Gilberte and Manon, chose more conventional methods to go out as often as possible (army reserve, summer job in another region). In such cases, some parental supervision remained; therefore these escapades were not really the same as "running away."

Given these circumstances and the need for independence, the quality of the relationships with siblings did not tend to improve.

6. Relationship with brothers and sisters

While several got along well with their brothers or sisters when they were young, or enjoyed a good relationship with a brother or sister, relationships often deteriorated as they joined a world that was more marginal than their's:

When I began to use drugs, my sisters were very hard on me and would have nothing to do with me ... When I stopped taking drugs we began seeing each other again. I had become more acceptable to them. (Claudine)

In some cases, relationships continued. Brothers and sisters accepted the situation and were even supportive when time were difficult. In the majority of cases, however, relationships deteriorated and ended on a note of incomprehension, non-acceptance, or simply did not improve because they were never pleasant or satisfactory to begin with.

7. Notes on family life

In spite of the bad memories and conflicts, the women found it very difficult to break loose from their families, especially from their mothers because they perceived them as more tolerant of their way of life and more prepared to help them in case of need than were their fathers. This does not at all differentiate our subjects from the rest of teenagers, whether delinquent or not.

In adolescence as in adulthood, many of our subjects' parents (especially the mother) acted as life-jackets during illness, when in debt, or when something needed attention.

Even if they are more or less satisfied with the help received when away from home, they still come back to the fold because the parents apparently remain the only ones upon whom they can count for support any time, particularly when friends are scarce:

... she (my mother) is even my closest confidante. I don't tell her everything, but since I don't have a friend, I talk to her more than anyone else. (Charlotte)

In general, it is clear that for these women the family is an unsatisfactory place. They do not believe that they experienced respectful and trusting relationships. They also believe that their physical well-being may have been threatened. While, in general, they are quite sincere about how they feel, it is also true that because of their condition they cannot easily establish new harmonious relationships. While they expect, and even demand, a lot of understanding, affection, and freedom from others, they themselves are very inflexible towards others, especially with respect to authority and when they want or are unsatisfied with something. Little inclined to giving in, they are reproachful of anyone who does not give them enough, while they themselves give little in return. Thus, the difference between what they want (harmonious relationships, for example) and what they are prepared to concede in return seems quite pronounced. The intensity of their needs, which differentiated them from more traditional teenagers, ensured that their parents, sometimes in great emotional distress themselves, could not meet their demands. Therefore, their

expectations often result in their being misunderstood and sometimes even unloved. Undoubtedly such family experiences or attitudes toward their families are eventually reflected in their experiences and relations with other people and in the choices that they make.

While the family environment did not always provide a desirable atmosphere, did their parents, brothers and sisters have a delinquent influence on our subjects? It is clear that for the majority of the subjects in this study, immediate relatives did not provide models of delinquency. However, for five women there has obviously been an encouragement to delinquency in one form or another. Stéphanie's case illustrates this in that her father encouraged her to become a prostitute at the age of thirteen, and several of her brothers spent time in prison. Nevertheless, this case is representative of only a minority of our interviewees.

While the family does not always offer an ideal environment for growth, what about school?

B. ADOLESCENCE

1. School

In our society, getting an education is seen as one of the main ways of preparing for a career or a trade which provides social recognition, economic independence, and a certain degree of autonomy. However, during their teens, the majority of the subjects dropped out of school before

finishing their secondary education or before obtaining a professional diploma, even if they knew that to become a hairdresser, machine operator, or secretary, one needs a basic diploma. What, then, were the consequences of dropping out of school?

In some cases, the family was not helpful. Some parents, placed little or no importance on school attendance (perhaps because, as in Stéphanie's case, they themselves had little education), and did not worry about their absence from school even when their children were very young:

Not once did my parents ask me to stop wandering around and go back to school. Even if they received reports that I was absent, they did not care a damn. (Charlotte).

Their parents told them that henceforth they had to look after their own financial needs and could no longer count on them for money. Some even forced them to quit school, find a job, and bring in a salary so as to lighten their parents financial burden.

However, most of the parents (in many cases the mother) encouraged their daughters to continue their education and learn a trade in spite of their own generally low level of education. Overall, the family environment seems to have been, to some extent, conducive to education or at least not negative because nearly half of the women said that one or several of their brothers and sisters finished a vocational

program (secretarial, registered nurse). Without parental influence, some would have quite school much sooner, such as Georgette who enrolled in the CEGEP only under pressure from them.

Although important, the parents' attitude toward school was not crucial in the decision to continue or terminate one's education. As we saw earlier, adolescents often experience very serious conflicts with parents, challenging their ideas and their authority. They also notice that, given their parents' example and that of those around them, it is possible to live and work with little education. Therefore, what is more important is the perception that adolescents have of school. Generally, they tended to have an unfavourable attitudes toward school and focused mainly on its unpleasant aspects.

First, their main concerns were concrete and immediate: they wanted to do something that gave them immediate enjoyment, money and freedom. Therefore, school was seen as having nothing to do with reality, because it did not offer immediate or short-term rewards. Moreover, the vast majority of them did not have any plans for the future, and lived from day to day:

It is useless to live for the future
because one can die tomorrow. (Diane).

Their view of the future, both at the vocational and personal levels, was very nebulous. The things they were certain about had to do with marriage and motherhood;

something which does not differentiate them from all other adolescents who, according to Baker (1985), very frequently choose family life as their future way of life. They apparently did not see the need to train to ensure their own later livelihood (or simply did not think about the future) because they expected that their partner would look after that. Since adolescence, several have also tended to believe that their partner should support the needs and habits that they will have as adults. Like all adolescents (Baker, 1985), those who hoped to obtain an education are mainly interested in traditional types of female employment (secretary, clerk).

Therefore, they lacked sufficient motivation to attend school and saw only the frustrations that it involved: financial dependence on parents, a discipline which resembled the discipline that they rejected from their parents, the duty to attend classes. Compared to the few immediate rewards, these considerably reduced their interest in school.

Of course, some girls were aware that school was a good way to accomplish something and/or entertained ideals such as pursuing a career as an artist (Claire), medicine (Gilberte) or simply becoming somebody (Sylvie). Meanwhile, the apparent unrealizability of these dreams and their daily life relegated them to the realm of fantasy, and led them to drop out of school perhaps with a little more bitterness than the others.

While the subjects in this study were not oriented toward a professional future, the women interviewed did admit that they were very interested in some extra-curricular activities. To them, school was a place where one could meet young people for whom school was of no particular interest. It offered an easy opportunity to loaf around as a group and to skip courses. It also offered an opportunity to live more and more at night.

Thus they began a fast-paced and frantic life (mood modifying drugs, night-long parties):

... near the end I went to bed very late
and often I did not go to bed at all.
(Claudine).

In this sort of life, there was less and less time for school, both because they did not encourage each other to attend and because their frequent absence from school increased their rate of failure which further discouraged them to go on:

... since I was often absent, I had trouble
keeping up and my grades were very poor
... (Charlotte).

These teenagers, therefore, quit school because they believed that it was useless, offered nothing, and especially because it paid no money at a time when they wanted to become financially independent from their parents and not be subjected to any discipline whatsoever. Some (14) were expelled because they were too disruptive in class. Others attempted to reduce their responsibility this way:

We were in a very rich neighborhood, and not very many people went to school at a late age For school to have made any difference in my life, I would have had to attend university ... (Elisabeth).

... we stopped going to school very early because we did not want to make our mother work too hard. (Armande).

Others tried to convince their interviewer that the reason they quit school was not a lack of ability. On the contrary, according to them they could loaf around, not study, get drunk or stay out all night and still get good grades:

In spite of my drinking, things went well at school, ... I liked only 10% of my subjects, for the rest I loafed around, I slept in the hallways... I never studied. I learned just by listening to the teacher. (Fiona).

Out of the total, only one woman reached college level, seven stopped at the fourth or fifth year of high school, and six dropped out in the first or second year. Five did not go beyond elementary school.

Although some of them began causing disciplinary problems as early as elementary school, the majority did not rebel until they reached high school where the structure involved less supervision and they were at an age when they began to confront their teachers:

When I was in elementary school ... I was impressed by my teacher. As soon as I reached high school, things changed. I was now able to stand up to them. (Claire)

Nearly all of them dropped out of high school without having obtained either a diploma or professional skills.

Finally, we should mention that some of the women did not quit school on their own, but because they gave birth to a child (1), because of imprisonment (1) or because they had to bring in a salary for their family (3). Gilberte and Jocelyne are two exceptions, however. Since they felt that it was very important to obtain a education, they soon returned to night school in spite of obvious difficulties (one was raising a child without her parents' knowledge):

... for a year and a half I took secretarial evening courses... I could never tell my parents because they would not have wanted me to spend my money on courses.
(Jocelyne)

The difficulties encountered at school by most of our interviewees offer an insight into the complications that they would eventually face regarding work and their search for employment.

2. Employment and livelihood

In spite of their desire to become financially independent, which sometimes justified their lack of interest in school, only six of them held jobs during their free time while attending school or when they dropped out between the ages of 12 and 17. Generally, they worked for brief periods in part-time jobs, or during summers as waitresses, sales girls or in a factory, to keep busy, make money or get away from one's family.

The other girls did not seriously intend to keep a job to meet their needs. In fact, they did not really give it serious consideration. Those who tried to find work after leaving school quickly found that, because of their young age and lack of training and experience, only low-paying and uninteresting jobs were available to them. Given their difficulty in dealing with an employer's authority that did not differ too much from that of a parent or teacher, their good intentions quickly vanished.

Without intending to explain what led our subjects to adopt such attitudes, one finds that their difficulty in adapting to schools, the working world, their revolt against their parents or against all authority are only a few indicators of their gradual drift into the fringe of society. While until then their attitudes may have corresponded to that of normal adolescents experiencing a crisis, the choices that they began to make with respect to their new friends and activities differentiated them from the norm and serve to highlight their deviant pattern.

3. Friends and activities

As adolescents, none of our interviewees (except those enrolled in the army reserve) were interested in any sport or cultural activity. They liked to spend their time in arcades, pool halls, etc. These, like the school yard and the street, were the main places where young people came into contact with new experiences and perhaps broke the

monotony of their life. In fact, whether or not they sought these experiences, they came into contact with them through their association with other youths who invariably suggested quick ways of earning money whenever they were pennyless. If, at first, such acts may have surprised or shocked them, the need to stay with the group forced them to adopt the new values.

The apparent ease with which these illegal gains were made, compared to holding a job, did not fail to entice even the more reluctant (or those least influenced by example or insistence) to go with them or on their own. After a petty theft or a customer, the habit came easy; particularly when money came so quickly and everyone around the was doing it. Although we do not want to delve into this topic now, since a whole section is devoted to it, we should point out that 14 of our subjects committed offences during their teens years, eight of which were against the person. While some began their delinquency at the age of eight, others committed their first theft around seventeen.

As adolescents, our interviewees liked to keep together as a group. When they speak of their "gang", they often refer to a group of persons who knew each other and who met in a bar or at a party to have fun. From 12 to 14 years of age, only Diane received support from a group varying in number from 5 to 10 youths with who she engaged in her activities, although no specific rules seem to have governed the group.

Since friends took on an increasingly important role in their lives, nearly all of the women had a very extensive circle of acquaintances. However, in spite of the constant presence of a large number of people around them, early on they began to show signs that they were having difficulty establishing intimate relationships and developing lasting bonds. These difficulties would persist into their adult life. Several describe themselves as loners, preferring to be close to one or two friends, and showing no inclination to gossip or confide in anyone. Are they really loners or do they prefer being alone because they lack the skills or trust to make friends? As far as they are concerned, life within the group is ideal and non-threatening because the presence of a large number of persons eliminates the possibility of sustained conversation and the need for secrets:

I have never really liked to trust anyone.
I love being a member of the gang... I am
accustomed to living with five, ten or
fifteen other people. Living in two re-
quires that you speak all the time.
(Georgette).

While some adolescents found it easy to form bonds with other youths and were appreciated for some of their qualities such as strength: "... the little guys appreciate my strength..." (Rita), others found it very hard to make friends. Thus, Charlotte who was obese, between the ages of nine to fifteen did not succeed in joining up with anyone else except the girls in her circle of juvenile prostitutes.

As they grew older, their relationships with boys tended to take on a more sexual character. In fact, Claire cannot envision any other type of relationship with them:

Rarely are you with the guys unless it is for sex or because you are in love. The guys stay together on one side, and the girls on the other. Everyone goes about his own business.

More or less available sexually, they changed partners frequently, and went through a number of short love affairs. Those who no longer had a fixed address because they had left or were trying to leave their parents, cohabited as couples:

I always had a guy with whom I stayed for two or three months, after which we would change partners. (Diane).

As we have seen, the persons that they associated with were people who lived on the fringe of society and who were involved in a variety of illegal activities. In fact, only Sylvie saw a "straight" friend on a regular basis; that is someone who did not use drugs, who took courses, and did not go to clubs. However, as she herself got deeper and deeper in a more marginal world, their relationship deteriorated. The more these girls saw people who seemed to enjoy the freedom that they dreamt about, and who may have provided them with the recognition and appreciation that they sought, the more they identified with them and learnt new ways of having a good time.

4. Fighting

For Elisabeth, Rita and Claudine, having fun meant, among other things, learning to fight. Between nine and thirteen years of age, all three enjoyed fighting at school over anything. They fought one against one (although Rita suggests that she took part in group fights) to avenge their honour or that of one of their friends too weak to defend themselves, because they were intolerant, to teach a lesson, or just for fun. They also fought boys, because refusing to stand up to them was seen as a sign of weakness and cowardice even though they knew that the boys would hit back, even against girls:

We loved to fight the little English kids over anything. We would jump on their backs just for the fun of it.... Even if they were guys, as was often the case, we were not afraid. (Elisabeth).

It is interesting to note that among those who seemed rough and almost invincible, there was one who stopped fighting once she realized that fighting was not really becoming to a woman:

I never received a blow, but I gave many of them (Around 13-14 years of age) I attended a girls' school.... I saw older girls in their fourth or fifth year of high school who never fought because they felt it was not a womanly thing to do... So I stopped fighting too. (Claudine).

Some of the others may have fought once or twice but only when they felt they had no choice. Either because they did not like fighting: "There were many girls who were

cry-babies. I stayed away from them because I like to fight and quarrel" (Claire). Others did not fight because they won respect in other ways:

I knew that I was stronger than most, so I did not have to fight to be respected. There weren't many who dared to come after me because I also had a strong voice.
(Armande)

Thus, only a small minority of the girls were afraid to hit out, yet fighting was just a small part of their activities.

At the same time as they were being introduced to delinquency and to fighting, and were finding their place in a group, these teenagers were also being introduced to drugs.

5. Introduction to mood modifying drugs

As was the case with their first theft or their first trick, the first experiences with drugs involved several factors. First their easy availability. Young people could get them everywhere, especially in the school yard: "At school one can buy anything he wants, the pusher came there" (Elisabeth). One often got them from one's friends, pushers or acquaintances at school who used them and who described the pleasant feelings that they induced. They also found drugs at home where, following their parents' example, when experiencing a bout of depression or following strained family relations, they decided that a small drink or their mother's pills might lift up their spirits too. Moreover, using drugs only once was not seen as a habit and the first

use of drugs was generally at the parents' expense or the result of the generosity of friends with whom they shared them:

Of course, some may have been afraid of what they were doing:

At first, I did not use drugs because I was afraid, but once she gave them to me I decided to take them because she (my friend) seemed to be enjoying herself so much... (Claire).

Because they heard and saw only the pleasant and not the negative aspects, they usually gave in to the temptation.

Although the age at which they were introduced to drugs varied between eight and twenty years, usually they ventured into this type of experience between the ages of twelve and twenty. The occasion might have been a party, a club, or simply in the school yard or at home. They tried mainly marijuana or hashish, but also glue, pills, LSD, cocaine, or even combinations: "I tried so many things that I did not know what I was taking." (Claudine).

Uncertain of what direction to take, and caught between several contradictory loves (parents, school, friends), the experience of drugs often captivated them very quickly because of the apparent calm, intense sensations and altered states that they produced.

6. Types of drugs used and their effects

Usually they began with the more easily available drugs:

I began to sniff (glue) every day, it was cheap and sold everywhere, even in kits (bag, glue) and I tried real drugs ... in other words everything that was around. (Charlotte).

The women in this study tried everything depending on the contacts that they made, the pushers that they knew, and how much they wanted to intensify their experiences. Even if they often preferred one substance over the others, they used every thing that was available and that they could afford. Heroin and glue were not too popular. Seen as dangerous (another word for addiction) since it could not be substituted, heroin was feared and only four women used it on a regular basis. Glue was also disliked because of its bad effects.

Given their availability (prescription, and everyone around them), pills (valium, amphetamine) held an important place in their daily lives. Alcohol was generally seen as less serious and less intoxicating. While all the subjects used it regularly, only three women consumed exclusively alcohol. They said that they were drawn to it by its social respectability: "One just drank something, it was more social" (Armande), and by the fact that it was legal: "... it is not illegal and so it caused less trouble" (Gilberte).

Some women did use particular substances because of the specific effects that they were seeking:

Then I took LSD. I loved it because it let me escape from the world around me. (Manon).

Coke stimulated me, and relaxed me less.
(Elisabeth).

Others were less selective. They said that:

...glue makes me more aggressive, speed
revs me up, pills slow me down and are more
depressive. (Claire).

Generally, these substances were also used to raise
their consciousness, activate their imagination or make them
less sensitive to the world around them:

I am very different when I am stoned. I
don't give a damn about anything. Once I
even ran into my father on the street. He
was looking for a girl, I was looking for a
customer. It didn't bother me at all
because I was stoned. (Colette).

At the beginning, the use of drugs did not create a
problem. They used them for enjoyment and liked the
effects. On the other hand, for about half of the subjects,
drug use became more serious in terms of frequency, quantity
and dependency within two or three years. Before the end of
adolescence, the majority were already struggling with a
serious "drug and/or alcohol problem":

She took me with her one evening and paid
for a trip... I began going out with her
often and to use drugs every day and more
and more each day. (Claudine).

It should be noted that several of them quickly became
dependent on these substances almost as if they were a
crutch compensating for what they lacked in other areas of
their lives (family, friendship, personal success). For

others, it took a few years for them to become dependent, mainly because their parents gave them few opportunities: "It is not that I didn't want to try, I just didn't have the chance." (Gilberte). Others simply took longer to get hooked.

Without suggesting a causal relationship, we found that those who began using drugs early and regularly were generally the first to leave school and begin a life of delinquency (14 women fit this pattern). The opposite is also true. For example Jocelyne, who at twenty, settled down to a disciplined adolescence concentrated on work, joined a marginal world only when she married.

As their interests shifted to drugs and their increased use, other social activities were given up in quick succession because the effects of the substances used made it difficult for them to pursue or be interested in those activities: "... when I began taking drugs, I gave up (sports) because it is difficult to run when you're on drugs, you are unsteady and don't have any energy." (Claudine).

As they become addicted to the effects of drugs, the sensations that they felt become less attractive because drugs were no longer really used for pleasure and they could no longer do without them. For some, this regular use was accompanied by a sense of detachment, a casualness, and a lack of awareness of what they were doing:

I knew that I was taking very large amounts. But I didn't care, I was hooked. (Rolande);

To this day, I still sniff (glue). I know that it is not good for your body and that it makes you forget things, but the effect is something else...and when you need drugs it is easy to get them. (Claire).

Others used drugs to deal with the risks involved in committing an offence. For example:

When I was a teenager, it did not affect me so much that I had to risk getting caught... I also was taking less dope. It was more for the thrill of it than because I had to take it. I also took it because it made it easier to commit more risky acts. (Elisabeth).

Since they now had less control over their emotions, the least provocation often took on great importance and quickly made them aggressive or distressed. For several of them, drugs also led them to ignore their body: the more intoxicated among them lost weight and began suffering various illnesses (anemia, trembling):

During the last year I had a big problem, for example. To type (at the typewriter), I had to take a small swig in my compartment every half hour, otherwise I would shake too much. (Fiona, at 17).

One of their main concerns was to obtain money for drugs. Lack of money and fear of bad products were constant. The whole lives of some individuals revolved completely around these concerns: "...the first thing you did when you arrived in a city was to find out where the drug spots were located..." (Georgette).

Their addiction to these substances also seems to have hastened their integration in an environment conducive to crime. At the beginning, the lack of money, even for those who were unemployed, did not prevent them from obtaining and using the substances that they wanted. They began to increasingly rely for their supply on their companions from whom they often borrowed by charming them:

I let the guys give them to me. They supplied almost anything for a few favors.
(Manon).

But the time came when their companions were less generous and debtors began demanding to be repaid. Rather than cut down on their use of drugs, they sought a quick way of paying back their debts while continuing with their daily habit. Therefore, they worked as barmaids, dancers, prostitutes, took part in trafficking these substances, stole and, when earnings were not enough, performed more than one of these activities at the same time:

...of course, to pay for it, I ended up selling it. (Sylvie).

Since drinking cost me a lot when I went out, she took me to a club to introduce me to the manager as a dancer and told me that, good looking as I was, I could make a lot of money. (Manon).

All the first offences that they committed were not necessarily aimed at meeting their needs for drugs, because delinquency and drug usage could begin at the same time. Some may have stole more or committed more profitable offences in order to increase their earnings and thus ensure

their supply. For others, however, the use of drugs and delinquency must be closely linked because when they stopped using drugs they also stopped committing all acts of delinquency.

7. Personal problems linked to their delinquent lifestyle

In the course of their repeated use of drugs, over-use of drugs, and delinquency, the women in this study indicated that they associated with people who were older than they and who were more active in criminal circles. Nothing in their lifestyle was compatible with the "straight" world and other youths their age seemed too dull. They lived more and more on the profits from their offences or from those committed by those around them.

For each one, one can identify an approximate date when the growing process of integration in this environment became visible. Some women are even able to pin-point the moment when they entered a world whose pace of life at the time seemed startling to them:

...a friend of mine took me with her to lower-town. I had never been there...I found the music and the lights exciting, and everybody knew everybody else. I stayed all night and never went back to the restaurant where I had been working until then. There were so many drugs changing hands, pushers, choice, money everywhere. (Colette).

In retrospect, recalling the whirlwind activities at that time, these women have the impression that their

adolescence was very turbulent. Calm, serenity, and knowledge of themselves seem to have been absent from their lives. Therefore, the less well they felt, the more drugs they used:

I did not know what I wanted. I left school. I did not want to work. Nothing interested me. I spent my days stoned, thinking about nothing, doing nothing. (Manon).

They were relatively dissatisfied with their existence but did not know whom or what to blame. While adolescence itself is a difficult phase to go through, these women's experiences represent extreme cases. Faced with their excessive ways, adults found it difficult to deal with them. Some parents felt over-whelmed and decided to throw them out. For example, Diane noted that when she was fourteen:

My parents could not get used to my pace of life. They criticized me, threatened to call the police unless I stopped taking drugs, tried to keep me from going out, then finally they told me if I wanted to do what I wanted I should move out of the house. (Diane).

Other parents tried to change their children's schooling by paying for private schools (2) or dance courses (1). In some cases, brothers and sisters tried to intervene:

My sister once tried to take me out with her friends after my detoxication so that I might change my circle of friends.... But I did not enjoy their "trip" at all. It was not my group. (Rolande).

Consequently, patience being exhausted on both sides, six women were sent to group homes several times between the age of nine and fifteen, for periods ranging from one to

nine months. For those whose parents were unfit, social services intervened. This was the case for Charlotte:

My parents certainly knew about it (prostitution and heroin when I was nine) but they said nothing. However, I would come home late with lots of money which they quickly spent without asking any questions. (Charlotte).

If we are to believe Charlotte and Diane, these periods spent in institutions did not always attain their intended objectives:

...I wasted nine months at the Villa with other girls who were doing the same thing as me. (Charlotte).

She (a friend) taught me the tricks of the trade in order to obtain drugs as I needed them or to go out when not allowed. She described each teacher's character to me so that I could manipulate them. (Diane).

When the opportunity presented itself, they ran away and returned to their friends and their world. This is what one had to say to her stay at the institution:

It changed nothing about me other than to make me more careful, because I was now known to the police. (Stéphanie).

About half of the subjects left their family's home for the last time before they were 16. Two women left after they were 18.

8. Conclusion

Although the women interviewed rarely spoke of their childhood, to some extent this silence indicated the lack of important things or unique events to talk about. Only four women were involved in delinquent activities at a very young

age. On the other hand, only four women experienced a traditional way of life, family and education. These became involved in delinquent activities somewhat later.

The adolescence of the subjects in this study seems to be relatively symptomatic. While it resembled that of all young people because of the variety of behaviour and the attitudes of rebellion and defiance against the limits imposed upon them (Gagnon et al., 1980), it clearly differs from the norm because of the intensity in which difficult situations were handled.

An analysis of the development processes and patterns of women, who would eventually be sentenced for serious offences, cannot ignore the handicaps that they had to bear as adolescents. In some cases, they seem to have plunged into the adult world at an age when they should have been rescued from their choices or helped to make better ones. Their environment as well as the women themselves do not seem to have possessed characteristics that might have oriented their lives in more conventional directions. The passing of years hardened positions to such an extent that when they reached legal age, the dye was already cast. What can one say about the choices themselves? For these women, they were extremely limited. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that their future turned out to be a logical continuation of their past.

C. ADULTHOOD

1. Activities and employment

The life led by our respondents once they became adults completely reflects what they did as teenagers. Only the four women who received a more traditional upbringing changed their orientation and joined a delinquent environment because of a love relationship when they were over twenty years old. One even did so when she was thirty. Their way of life therefore resembles that of all the subjects in this study. Some women (5), mainly among those sentenced for involuntary manslaughter or attempted murder (two of whom entered this environment late), had shorter delinquent records. So they are somewhat less than full members of this criminal world.

Let us see what a typical day would be for our subjects:

A typical day for me was to get up at noon, take drugs to pep me up or speed me or take a little glue because usually I was quite depressed when I got up. In the early afternoon I would go on the street to find some customers if the weather was nice. If it rained I went in bars where there were customers. I turned tricks all day long and only took time off for coffee with the girls. In the evening I went to various bars with a gang... And I went to bed around four in the morning. (Claire).

Although they did not have set hours, their activities did follow a certain pattern. In general, those who worked as prostitutes or pushed drugs began their workday in early afternoon to meet their daily quota. Those who had no

specific employment (neither job nor delinquency), perhaps because they were supported by a lover, hung around, strolled, visited friends, went to the movies, and waited for the day to end and the night to begin, when their activities would start. The night life of all our respondents was in bars and nude dancing clubs which were their favored meeting places. There, some laughed, drank, bought or sold drugs, and "cruised"; others found clients (prostitution), made useful contacts, planned a job, or worked (dancer, barmaid, ...).

Although one of the main concerns of all respondents was their continuous search of money, their lifestyle and the size of their financial needs were not conducive to keeping a regular job to meet their needs.

First, it was difficult for them to contemplate earning only a meagre wage (since they had neither training nor continuous work experience) when even the substantial income from their delinquent occupations did not meet their needs. Hence their continuous indebtedness. Their pace of life made the situation even more complicated. Living mainly at night, under the effect mood modifying drugs, they were in no condition to meet the demands of a job: "... during the day I was too tired to work. When you don't sleep at night, you have to sleep during the day." (Manon).

Moreover, within their circle there were no examples, no models to give respectability to work or to encourage them to adopt an acceptable solution for their economic problems:

When I was younger I did want a real job, but my friend did not, saying that I would be used...I let it go at that. (Stéphanie).

At best, they were encouraged to work mainly as dancers or barmaids (occasionally as a bouncer in a club, the case with a more robust subject) while pushing drugs; because it was the typical female jobs which could earn the most money for them. Rather than lead them to a more conventional life style, these jobs binded them even more to their environment and made it easier for them to get involved in other illegal activities and to come to know people i.e. "heavies", who were very involved in this type of world:

I was a bouncer in a club in lower town where I knew quite a few people. I was a paying side-line which let you meet well placed people and to find out what was going on. (Rita).

They referred me to a barmaid's job. I went there to sell drugs too... (Jocelyne).

In spite of that, at some point most of our respondents held a regular job because they realized that it offered some advantages. Having a job, for example, made it easier to go on parole or, after prison, to avoid falling back into the old way of life. It involved a routine and it made it possible to earn a stable income, take care of oneself, and perhaps reduce the temptation to plan an offence. As Rita told us:

When you are on welfare, you have nothing to do. So to keep busy you steal, especially since on welfare you don't receive enough money to live decently. (Rita).

However, they didn't go so far as to believe, like the male perpetrators of armed robberies discussed by Dionne (1983, p. 64), that having a stable job had an important social value such as making it possible to begin raising a family. Bearing in mind their tendency to be supported financially by a man (sometimes by a woman), our subjects continued to rely on their spouse to ensure their well-being.

The subjects in our sample, therefore, had work experiences that ranged from a total lack of experience to a life devoted to an occupation. Also, the women who had the most work experience were those who were the least active in committing offences. Generally speaking, our respondents worked a few months, intermittently, in non-specialized and traditionally female jobs (waitresses, cooks, seamstresses), which they then quit mainly because the salary was considered too low or because they had difficulty adjusting to the requirements set by the employer; constraints that they considered unnecessary.

2. Interpersonal relations

As adults, our respondents associated mainly with people involved in the same sort of activities as themselves. Their friends were those who sold them drugs, other girls on the street, and various persons met in bars. Since their adolescence, they did not seem to have improved their ability to establish intimate relations with anyone. In fact, several of them maintained superficial relations with persons in whom they were not really interested:

At that time (17-18 years old), I went with absolutely anybody. In any case it did not matter because I did not get attached to anyone particular. (Manon).

Even among good friends, intimacy left much to be desired. As was the case during adolescence, they usually found themselves alone with their problems because their acquaintances provided little moral and physical support:

My gang on the street was made up of girls that I had been with for a couple of years. They were real friends who supported you. But they have their own problems. So you do not burden them with your problems. You just keep them to yourself. (Colette).

If I told a friend that I was depressed, she would give me some uppers and I would be OK for a while until I came down again. (Claire).

More specifically, friendship between men and women seemed difficult to establish: "It is rare that you hang around with guys unless it is for sex or because you're in love." (Gabrielle). This seems to be linked to the fact that women in this environment had a very stereotyped image: they were seen as sex prostitutes, and adjusted to this sex-related role, at least for a time: "You dance for others, you enjoy yourself ..." (Manon). They appreciated these relationships in which men supplied them with alcohol, drugs and pleasure in return for their favors. The reason for this, perhaps, is that since their entry into this environment, they became aware that their acceptance and reputation was closely linked to their ability to attract attention and the men that they associated with:

I am certain that if I had not belonged to one of the men there I would never have had been able to join the circle. It is too closely watched. (Gilberte).

I was always respected in that circle because I went with people who were proper and respected. (Claudine).

It is interesting to note the contradictory aspects these women's sex-related activities. While the men appreciated and stimulated them, they at the same time held these women in low esteem. Gabrielle, for example, notes that: "When you are a prostitute, the guys often take you less seriously."

Given the importance of their social and emotional involvement with men, some women such as Claudine and Sylvie entered into a sort of competition with each other. Therefore, the presence of other women in their circle was not looked upon favourably, perhaps because they were seen as threatening in that they might cause one's lover to be unfaithful or make them lose their own privileged position:

I find that real friendship with women is impossible because when you find a good boyfriend with whom you get along, other women envy you and that can cause problems. (Claudine).

In these circles women often represented only a sexual object, and relations were temporary and mainly based on a search for sexual gratification. Therefore, according to Charlotte: "... it is sex that dominates, and not love." And developing a satisfying love relationship is very difficult.

At that time (17-18 years old), I went with absolutely anybody. In any case it did not matter because I did not get attached to anyone particular. (Manon).

Even among good friends, intimacy left much to be desired. As was the case during adolescence, they usually found themselves alone with their problems because their acquaintances provided little moral and physical support:

My gang on the street was made up of girls that I had been with for a couple of years. They were real friends who supported you. But they have their own problems. So you do not burden them with your problems. You just keep them to yourself. (Colette).

If I told a friend that I was depressed, she would give me some uppers and I would be OK for a while until I came down again. (Claire).

More specifically, friendship between men and women seemed difficult to establish: "It is rare that you hang around with guys unless it is for sex or because you're in love." (Gabrielle). This seems to be linked to the fact that women in this environment had a very stereotyped image: they were seen as sex prostitutes, and adjusted to this sex-related role, at least for a time: "You dance for others, you enjoy yourself ..." (Manon). They appreciated these relationships in which men supplied them with alcohol, drugs and pleasure in return for their favors. The reason for this, perhaps, is that since their entry into this environment, they became aware that their acceptance and reputation was closely linked to their ability to attract attention and the men that they associated with:

I am certain that if I had not belonged to one of the men there I would never have had been able to join the circle. It is too closely watched. (Gilberte).

I was always respected in that circle because I went with people who were proper and respected. (Claudine).

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3. Love relationships

In spite of the type of relationship that prevailed in these circles, the subjects continued to dream of and wait for romantic love. They indulge in illusions of a "Great Love", fidelity, marriage, and family life:

A Great Love comes only once in a lifetime... If it happens to me, I will give up everything for it and settle down. I will stay at home to take care of him and our children. (Elisabeth).

In the meantime, while waiting for this man (or this woman), they experienced numerous love "affairs" and disappointments. In fact, these disappointments were due not only to the mentality that prevailed in their circles, but also to some of their own choices and attitudes which were far from conducive to the establishment of blooming relationships.

If one considers all the major love relationships experienced by our subjects, one finds that very often they began at a time when the women felt dissatisfied with her life, was penniless, and was unable or unwilling to escape from her situation alone. She felt a great emotional emptiness and appreciated being taken care of and relieved of her responsibilities:

...I met a guy in a bar who proposed to me after one week. Tired of life, of being stuck in a hole, dancing, I wanted a man. So I accepted. I hoped to stop working. But our marriage was not a happy one. (Danielle).

Accustomed to very stereotyped roles and attitudes, those who lived in a heterosexual love relationship continued to perpetuate these double standards. The education of children and the housework fell upon the woman. The man, who was implicitly recognized as the head of the household, generally assumed responsibility for the couple's financial support, whether or not there are children.

For me, it is up to the mother to look after the children and for the father to support the family financially.
(Gabrielle).

Therefore, he usually asked her to quit her job, if she had one, and in some cases even asked her to stop her delinquent activities. These values seemed so ingrained that one is led to believe that those men who were not disturbed by their wife's delinquency or the job that she had were maintaining a friendly or exploiting relationship rather than love a relationship. It is interesting to note that men who were indignant if their wife was involved in any offence, quickly changed their attitude when they (the men) were in trouble and tried to profit from her delinquency. Sylvie's case, where her friend did not want her to sell drugs, is a good example:

When he was arrested he learned that I sold drugs. First he got angry, then, he realized that I could provide him with money and pay for a good lawyer, he was happy.... I sold a lot of drugs at that time. My boyfriend never stopped telling me to sell more drugs because his lawyer was very expensive. And when I did not sell enough he would blow up at me. (Sylvie).

Some women had more difficulty adjusting to their partner's demands and continued with their activities. However, the majority were not very assertive.

Once infatuated with a man or a woman, but more often because they could no longer bear being alone, they readily gave up many of their wishes and needs just so that the relationship would continue and improve. Moreover, they were familiar only with this role model: that of their parents, whom they nevertheless condemned. Therefore, some tolerated violence from their companion (half of those living as couples were victims of violence). For some, love was only one-way, the man being interested in everything but their love: money, sex, etc. Or, according to one interviewee, ie. to be soothed, or because he abused her when a minor and wants to avoid trouble.¹⁴ It was this same inability to live alone which led Danielle, Stéphanie and Charlotte to become unconditional servants to a man, just so that they would not be alone after a recent separation from another man:

When I asked him to come and live with me, I promised to feed him, do his laundry, and take full care of him, so that he would not have to do anything. I did not want to be alone. (Stéphanie).

Of course, some women (about six) could handle loneliness better, or showed more strength of character than others. They had a lower tolerance threshold, and may have

¹⁴ These situations are not found in homosexual relationships.

also felt the joy of relying on someone. But they slowly and painfully pulled themselves together and tried to avoid entering into a new similar relationship. This, however, was not the case with the majority.

Since generally they were not very introspective, they did not look into the reasons for their unhappiness as a couple and had great trouble handling the difficulty inherent in their type of relationship. They often held their friend responsible for what happened to them as if to deny their own existence.

The difficulties that these women have in assuming responsibility in their relationship as a couple were also evident in their role as mothers.

4. The experience of motherhood

While nine of our subjects brought at least one pregnancy to term, the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy and its development for several of them do not lead one to conclude that it was the result of a carefully thought out decision reflecting maturity or a disposition to assume its responsibilities. Instead all indications are to the contrary.

Only three women partly planned the new arrival. In spite of a generally precarious personal and financial situation, only one had an abortion, the others expressed a negative attitude towards it. Mainly, however, they wanted

to fulfill an emotional need; have a little one to love. For some, the pregnancy developed under difficult circumstances. Throughout the pregnancy they consumed very large quantities of pills and drugs, supposedly because they did not know that they were harmful to the fetus:

Since early in my pregnancy I was very tired, the doctor ordered some valium to relax me, to take the place of alcohol. Since it was he who prescribed it, I took larger doses without thinking that it could harm the baby. I took tons of the stuff each week, stronger and stronger doses, and when I ran out I would steal it from my mother or from anybody. (Fiona).

Or they were so intoxicated that one of them did not realize that she was pregnant for some time:

When I was sixteen, I got pregnant but I noticed it only in the eighth month because I was very fat (275 lbs) and always stoned. When I had nausea I just thought that I was sick. I decided to go to the hospital because I was bleeding heavily and had abdominal pains. And it was there that they told me that I was pregnant. (Charlotte).

5. The effect of motherhood on their activities

Since they raised their children alone or because their companion, male or female, did not help out, the pace of life of these women (five) who looked after their own children inevitably underwent a change.

The presence of children, however, did not prevent them from being involved in illegal activities, in spite of a certain desire to stabilize their lives. This desire

In fact, these new responsibilities even led some of them (two had been little involved in delinquency until then) to look for ways to earn money quickly rather than to take a job that paid the minimum wage, even if they could find one.

These women may have tried to make sure (although this is very difficult) that their children did not come into contact with the world they frequented. They may have tried to do this by becoming more discrete, by consuming the least amount possible of alcohol at home, and by bringing a fewer number of questionable friends or customers at home. The presence of children also forced them to hesitate more before perpetrating an offence because the consequence of a bungled robbery or an arrest would now be more serious.

For the most part, however, their concern for their children, and their troubles when they found themselves in prison bothered, them very much. But these did not outweigh the advantages that they saw in illegal activities. One even warned her children in advance of activities that she was going to be involved in so that they would know what to do in case of trouble:

My children knew absolutely everything that I did when I went to steal...I had told my son before going out that I was going to commit this theft (robbery) and that I was not sure whether I would come back.
(Fiona).

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6. Conclusion

Perhaps because hardships are remembered better, when commenting on their development our respondents concentrated much more on deception than on satisfaction. Nearly all went through periods of depression that were more or less frequent depending on the individual. And six of them went as far as attempting suicide. Whether they gave a negative (12) or a positive (7) assessment of their life, they were all tempted at some time or other to change their way of life or escape their deplorable situation. In spite of their attempts, their personal and social situation did not improve over the years. They had difficulty taking care of themselves, always relying heavily on others or on outside means to maintain some sort of equilibrium. Indeed, they often held these same persons or external events responsible for their difficulties.

As we shall see in the following pages, this way of dealing with life also reflected their involvement in various aspects of criminality. Those who were accustomed to secondary roles in their love life tended to maintain this attitude during their robberies. On the other hand, those few women who were more independent were also more successful in making a place for themselves in the world of crime.

CHAPTER IV

Pattern of delinquency and penal consequences

A. PATTERN OF DELINQUENCY

Bearing in mind the aspects discussed in the preceding section, here we will deal with delinquency proper; the context in which it takes place, the methods used to perpetrate delinquent offences, and more specifically the offences for which the subjects in this study were selected.

Why focus on one act in particular when it is not necessarily representative of all their criminal offences against the person? First, because the limited context and the problem underlying this study did not permit us to focus on the overall criminality of our respondents. The aim here is more to describe the process by which our subjects took up a life of delinquency, hence the importance of taking into consideration the family, and the social and occupational environment. Secondly, this study deals with a particular type of offence: acts of violence against the person. Therefore, it is useful to emphasize those circumstances which will enable us to clarify it as best as possible. Finally, all the women who participated in the study did not commit a very large number of offences of this type. For the majority, their offences constituted exceptional or unusual behaviour. In fact, thirteen women in this sample are presently sentenced for the first time for an offence of this type, and eight of them had committed only one serious offence; the one studied here.

The information which follows is derived from the accounts given by the women who committed the offences. Their real criminality differs considerably from the portrait given by the penal authorities. Moreover, given the extent to which their version of the facts known to penal justice authorities conforms to the files that could be examined, there is no reason to doubt the veracity of the confidential information revealed to us.

The delinquency of our subjects generally began with a relatively minor offence. Their recollection of this initial misdeed is vague. Those who remember it speak of shoplifting or stealing things that belonged to individuals (at school for example) but some of the older ones also mention the sale of drugs. They date this first offence to the time they were 9-12 years old (7), 14-15 years (5) or when they were adults (2). Others who became precociously active in delinquency (3) could not pinpoint a specific act: "I don't remember my first job, there have been so many." (Elisabeth). In fact, they began their illegal activities gradually, so no specific act can be said to mark their entry into this way of life.

Only two women said that their first offence was a crime against the person: one, whose first offence was of the type studied here, and another who around 10-11 years of age agreed to accompany her brother to rob a money bag at a supermarket exit. However, when she saw a senior citizen

being thrown to the ground, she refrained from committing such robberies and did not perpetrate another one until five or six years later.

Once they committed their first misdeed, they realized how easy and profitable such acts were, and so the repetition of the offence became more and more frequent, especially when their circles reinforced this sort of behavior and when financial need became more pressing. Also, as they became more and more involved, these women increasingly diversified their criminal activities: fraud, burglaries, the sale of drugs, and prostitution.

The women interviewed did not all operate in the same manner. Differences are quite apparent between those sentenced for involuntary manslaughter or attempted murder and those who were apprehended for robbery.

The delinquency of the subjects in the first group is limited to two or three types of violation (for example, simple theft, sale of drugs, fraud). None of the women in this group were involved in burglaries or prostitution.

As for the women in the second group (ie. those sentenced for robbery) their initiation to delinquency was more precocious, either during childhood or early adolescence. From the beginning, their activities proceeded at a fast pace. One notes that these subjects experienced few periods of respite from their delinquency. Their activities were also very diverse and they constantly sought more profitable and less risky offences.

While there are obvious differences between the two groups, there are also some similarities. In varying degrees, the women in this sample committed several types of offences, as shown in the following table.

TABLE 6
Subject's involvement in non-violent delinquency

Number of Subjects	Violations	Subject's number																		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
9	Fraud			x		x	x	x	x			x				x	x	x		
15	Simple Theft	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x			x	x	x		x
12	Burglary		x	x			x	x	x		x	x	x			x		x		x
8	Prostitution		x	x			x		x		x	x	x					x		
16	Sale of drugs	x	x	x	x		x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x

The two most common types of offences among the majority of our subjects are simple theft and drug trafficking.

In addition to describing these various offences and the role they play in the lives of our subjects, it is also very important to identify some aspects that illustrate both the importance of these offences in the daily life of the women interviewed, and the role that these women played in the perpetration of these offences.

Simple thefts brought in little, much less than one hundred dollars and very rarely a few hundred dollars. For some women, however, the theft of easily available objects constituted an almost irresistible temptation:

...you might say that when I go in department stores, I cannot help myself from stealing, even if I have money on me; my fingers are just itching to steal. I must steal even if I feel that someone is watching. (Claire).

It is interesting to note what these women mean when they speak of fraud. To them, the falsification of cheques in the order of one thousand dollars is a gross fraud.

Their involvement in robberies was sporadic because they lacked experience, thus making such operations more risky, and also because the small returns from such acts must be shared with their partners in crime. Also, the way in which some committed their offences clearly demonstrates that they were amateurs.

The women felt more at ease, however, in selling drugs. This activity made it possible to supply themselves with these substances as well as reduce their debts with a minimum of risk. While sixteen of the nineteen women did this, the data shows that it is mainly an emergency measure. The same observation was made by Dionne (1983) in a study of male subjects involved in armed robbery.

There are, however, two subjects who were an exception to this sale of drugs for emergency or supply purposes. These women had their own territory, and sold to accumulate large profits and controlled their market aggressively:

A motorcycle gang tried to control the town's drug trade ...I told them to go away and that I was going to continue. They came to my place...I took my .12 and I warned them that I would shoot if they did not leave me alone. There was no way that I was going to give them control of the place. (Fiona).

Prostitution also plays a special role in the criminal involvement of the subjects in this study. Half of them have at one time or another been prostitutes. The role of "pimp" is not clear. They were heavily solicited but, in general, they preferred to operate without the protection of a man to whom they must turn over part of their earnings. However, this attitude changed radically if the man offering this type of protection happened to be their lover. This, of course, raises some questions as to the real motives of such "lovers".

The difficulties inherent in the practice of this trade led two women to stop their activities (comments by customers, increased consumption of drugs). Moreover, those who practiced the trade regularly believed that this type of work is better than others:

I did not want to stop and find myself as poor and dependent as before. I did not want to work at a regular job because living on a minimum wage is also a type of

slavery. It is true that I have experienced difficult moments on the street, but it would not have been better working and feeling exploited. (Diane).

B. ANTECEDENT FACTORS

In view of the facts presented in the preceding section, it would seem that the delinquent trajectory follows its own momentum. Over the years, the women interviewed varied their experiences and increasingly became members of active delinquent networks. What we must now try to understand are the circumstances that made it possible for them to commit offences that were much more violent than anything they had done before.

Some of the women in this sample were simply involved in unpremediated fortuitous acts. Whether they were committing a more benign act such as a robbery and were disturbed during the operation, or whether they were under the effect of some sort of intoxication, they felt provoked and reacted violently. They had not anticipated the act in question.

For other women, the scenario is different. Some, for example, had been specifically invited to participate in such an act:

When you sell drugs you come to know all sorts of people. Like me, everybody used drugs. And since I needed money, there were many ways of getting it, such as hold ups. So it was natural to be invited to participate. Nor was it the first time. (Sylvie).

The reasons they give for accepting the offer resemble those reported by Dionne (1983) who analyzed the responses of male subjects. Those reasons mainly included the fact that it was an easy way to make money quickly, the prestige it carried among peers, pressure from the group, and their very expensive habits:

I only thought of the risk of getting arrested...He told me that my role would be very simple. He told me of all the things that I could buy with this money: a beautiful car, clothes, a trip. All I had to do was to be ready to leave quickly.
(Diane).

They may also have accepted for fear of consequences that would ensue if they refused:

If you refuse to do what they ask you too often, it won't be long before the guys will leave you and begin seeing a girl who is willing. (Charlotte).

In some cases, what may have been at stake was the loss of one's lover, in others it may have been more a question of "an obligation to pay back a debt":

They asked me if I loved him enough to help them do a job... They played on my feelings, saying that if I refused, he might receive a heavy sentence and that I might regret it for the rest of my life.
(Jocelyne).

Here, therefore, it was a matter of amassing enough money to pay for an experienced lawyer who might reduce the sentence.

For other women, participation in this type of offence may have provided them with the excitement that they were looking for:

It was not just the money, but the "trip", the excitement. (Manon).

Moreover, one's sense of worth, self image, and advancement in the hierarchy of the delinquent world must also be considered. In this environment, women are not really expected to participate in this type of act. Therefore, those who do so are really attempting to distinguish themselves from those who are stuck with prostitution and drugs.

Unlike those who have done nothing to prepare themselves for such activities or who let themselves be encouraged to participate in an interesting job, there were five women in our sample who took the initiative. In two cases, they committed robberies while practicing their profession (prostitution). Concluding that their clients were not paying enough for the services they were receiving, they went for more:

I found that the clients were not paying enough for everything I gave them. So I decided to take more. (Claire).

For three others, what was involved was information passed on to them concerning the financial status of some potential victims:

... may have \$30,000 or \$40,000 hidden inside his house. (Sylvie).

One might find several thousands of dollars. (Fiona).

If they lacked experience, they simply joined up with a man who was skilled in the field.

Thus, apart from exceptional cases where the women had not had previous involvement in the perpetration of a serious offence, one notes that most of the subjects went through an escalation in both the number of type of offences committed.

It is useful to note that during their involvement in more organized forms of delinquency, women occupy only secondary positions compared to men. The subjects indicated that men hesitate to "work" with a women because, as noted by Steffensmeier (1980b, 1983) and Lucas (1927c), they find them less trustworthy, weaker, and more timid....:

I did not work with him because his circle did not appreciate the presence of a woman. (Gilberte).

Men will agree to "work" with a woman only if they find it advantageous to do so, otherwise they are not willing to play accessory roles that are usually entrusted to women:

I told him to ask his friends, but he said that he could not ask anyone just to accompany him to drive a car, because his chums would laugh at him. (Diane).

As far as advantages are concerned, women often serve as camouflage so to avoid raising suspicion.

Their attitude concerning the role they felt they had to adopt was instilled at an early age. One of the respondents expressed this feeling this way:

It was around this age (13 years) that I began to commit robberies with another girl, but not with guys,... Sometimes, I would see guys plan robberies; they asked all the guys present if they were interested but they did not ask the girls.

Myself, I never thought of offering. That was natural. Nor did I ever ask a guy to accompany me because he surely would have refused or laughed at me. (Claire).

Thus far we have illustrated the extent to which the accessory role that women are usually called upon to play in the perpetration of offences. Before specifically describing the act for which the subjects were selected for this sample, it is interesting to compare this act with all their other offences. Is it an isolated offence? Were there other violent offences in their past?

Since for eight subjects this was their first violent offence and three subjects had committed only one other violent offence (assault), it seems that the majority of the women in this sample did not habitually commit such offences.

The other eight respondents had a more sustained criminal background. However, while compared to the other subjects in the sample they committed a large number of robberies or assaults, they continued to be mainly involved in what has been conveniently called minor delinquency (shoplifting, drugs, and prostitution).

The information gathered through the questions concerning their involvement in delinquency revealed two facts in particular that deserve to be mentioned.

The first is that women lacked models of delinquency. The subjects interviewed drew inspiration from the male world, and it was there that they mainly served their

apprenticeship. The subjects had to adjust to a world that was not their own. For example, they did not have access to the lines of power, contacts, substantial earnings, and the expertise prevalent in that world. Therefore, they ended up realizing that to ensure a minimum of success, they must stay with men and to some extent give up their involvement with other women offenders:

I did not like working with women because I found them too emotional, jealous and weak. If they are arrested, they may talk under little pressure: they cannot be trusted. (Gilberte).

The second fact refers more specifically to a certain lack of ambition in their career. Not having their own role, and relatively excluded from the male world of powerful figures, one should not be surprised that the majority of our respondents made the realistic decision not to aspire to dominant positions in the criminal world. The consequence of this is that they did not perfect their methods, did not extend their network, and did not think of committing extremely daring acts.

These observations apply to the majority of the subjects interviewed. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions that have more to do with the planning of an offence than with recognition by peers or access to leading positions. Thus, four women in the sample succeeded in controlling their sector, in working with male accomplices and in gaining a reputation for the efficient way that they perpetrated their offences. Two of these four subjects attributed those successes to their homosexuality, arguing

the the non-sexualization of their relationships was an asset while the other two maintain that it was the superior quality of their work that earned them a privileged status.

Basically, the delinquency of the women in this sample resembles that of the great majority of men who are involved in severe offences, but who are not leaders and who circulate in the world of crime without ever acquiring real status. What distinguishes the women, however, is that usually they must come to terms with a male world where power is not accessible to them. If we are to believe one of the respondents, they were quite resigned to their fate:

Certainly there are men full of prejudices who would not even consider me as a partner in armed robberies. I just kept my distance from them, that's all. (Gilberte).

They also took advantage of the perception that other people may have of them as women. Therefore, they sometimes risked themselves and did not even take elementary precautions to avoid arrest. In this connection, the comments made by one respondent are very much to the point:

At that time, I was not afraid of being arrested. There was even a police officer who once told me ... that I had an angelic look about me, and my cute smile was too innocent to get me arrested...I was not careful enough when I sold. I didn't keep a sharp eye on things. (Gabrielle).

The above details can serve as an introduction for the following section. Special attention will now be devoted to one type of offence, the one for which the women in this survey were sentenced and which served as a criteria for their inclusion in this study.

C. PHASES OF A SERIOUS OFFENCE

In the preceding discussion we described the various involvements of our subjects in the perpetration of a violent offence. For some subjects, their's was a first offence, while for others it was just one of many other similar previous acts. Here we shall describe three distinct phases in the perpetration of an offence: planning, the act itself, and its consequences. As the reader will recall, we are dealing with one kidnapping, two attempted murders committed during a theft, four involuntary manslaughter, two of which were committed during a theft, and 12 robberies.

1. Planning

As mentioned above, the respondents in this sample did not necessarily intend to commit an offence of the type for which they were arrested and included in this study. In fact, four of the women expected to commit a robbery or even a simple theft. Moreover, more than half of the subjects (10) actively participated in planning the offence. As for the others, the testimony of one of the respondents clearly illustrates the perception that male accomplices had of the women's contribution:

They did the job by themselves, telling me that the less I knew the better it would be, and that it was not necessary to my role to know so much. (Diane).

Twelve of the sixteen thefts were carried out immediately after the idea was accepted, the only delay being the time it took to get to where the offence was committed and/or to locate, after a brief search with an automobile, a profitable business with few customers, employees and police officers. Such meagre planning was not necessarily due to inexperience, since only in three cases did the woman or her accomplice lack experience. Rather, it may have been due to a very pressing need for money, as was the case with Gilberte who relied upon her experience to avoid trouble; or it may have been due to the heavy use of mood modifying substances which gave the illusion of great power:

Sober, I would never have attempted such jobs because I was too nice for that. With drugs I felt that I became Superman. There was nothing that I could not do.
(Charlotte).

According to Charlotte, this practice was common among experienced thieves.

Of course, not all jobs are equally well planned. It depends on the type of business. When you have prepared one well, all the others are similar so they need less time to carry out. If you have your weapon in the car and you see a business, you may decide to do it at the last minute.
(Charlotte).

For kidnapping (1) and some robberies (4), planning varied from one day to a few weeks. This planning covered several aspects: the identification of a victim, the specific role of the accomplices, the distribution of the earnings, stalking the target, and the presence of obstacles (security guards, etc.):

When you contemplate a job, you think about it for a long time. For example, you arrange not to get there at the same time as Brinks. You visit the place as a tourist, you keep it under surveillance, find out its busy hours, and learn about the guards for two or three days if necessary. You make sure that everybody knows what to do. (Gilberte).

Planning was not always without error. For instance, in the testimonies that they gave on theft, only one made sure that the large sum of money which was expected to be there was indeed there. The others took it for granted that they would find the loot. Their hopes were often based on hearsay or relatively scanty information as to their victim's fortune. In this respect, senior citizens are good targets:

I was sure...that nothing serious would happen by choosing a senior citizen who kept her money at home, as people her age often do. She would be very afraid and would not offer any resistance. (Gabrielle).

Here, experience did play a role. The women in this sample who had a little experience tended to choose business (jewellery stores, grocery stores, service stations) rather than private residences. It should also be pointed out that they avoided banks, saying that these establishments were too risky.

Six respondents owned a firearm. Two others have carried a knife since their teen years, which they had acquired to protect themselves from their customers as prostitutes; then the weapon became useful to rob clients. One of the respondents received her firearm as a present

from her lover. Her delinquency was rather mild but she said:

One never knows what can happen. One can always need it (a weapon) in a club when a guy who is too drunk solicits us. Or against a maniac, and there are so many today. (Claudine).

Experience proved to be an important consideration as to whether or not one carried a weapon when committing an offence. The less experienced did not see the need and/or feared that the presence of a weapon would aggravate the situation in case of trouble. Those with more experience maintained that having a weapon would protect them in case of unforeseen events and may have even prevented trouble because it made victims "respect" them and thus reduced the risk of resistance. For some, it conferred greater power vis-a-vis the victim:

It was funny to see everybody turn pale. They see you as a really vicious person. (Elisabeth).

Half of the women admitted having been a bit afraid just before committing the offence. They felt rather frantic. Those who felt this fear were not participating of their own free will, and said that they had been more or less forced to participate in the offence. Whether to calm their nervousness or repress their fear, most of the respondents used mood modifiers, even if the consequences of such drugs could prove to be troublesome (rashness, precipitate action):

...sometimes, when you are stoned, you become dangerous because you take too many risks. (Charlotte).

2. Execution

Simon and Sharma (1974) as well as Steffensmeier (1980b) report that women rarely act alone when perpetrating robberies. This is verified because in the offences studied here the majority were committed by two or three individuals. Women operating alone are the exception. However, it is useful to note that when they committed their previous robberies, several operated alone and two subjects perpetrated all their past robberies without an accomplice.

When they worked with accomplices, they may have played various roles: watch the victims, gather the loot, drive the vehicle, etc. It seems that their role was less important when they worked in concert with men than when with women. On the other hand, the more experienced subjects were given more important responsibilities.

Contrary to the findings reported by Parisi (1982a) to the effect that women have a tendency to work as often, if not more, with women than with men, the women in this sample preferred male accomplices. And, as emphasized by Simon and Sharma (1974) as well as by Ward et al. (1969), they preferred to work with acquaintances rather than with persons with whom they were intimately connected, although some liked to relive "Bonny and Clyde" adventures with their lovers.

2.1 Amount of violence during the offences

Out of the nineteen offences analyzed in this study, eight robberies were carried out without the use of physical force. It is useful to note that out of these eight robberies, five were committed by experienced women who said that they knew how to control themselves even in unforeseen circumstances (for example: little money in the till or an overly nervous victim).

While criminal justice considers that the intimidation of a victim with a weapon in itself constitutes an element aggravating an offence, a type of psychological violence, our respondents viewed the situation differently. According to them, as long as the victim was not maltreated, no violence has been committed, and they saw psychological violence as a mere illusion. The following testimonies illustrate quite well the respondents' view:

...in Court her lawyer said that she had been traumatized, that she could no longer stay alone,... I think that she was putting it on. (Gabrielle).

All that I did to the victims was take their money, a few dollars. They need not get excited over that...There was one or two women who began to bawl, they were neurotic... There was no doubt that some get excited over nothing. (Armande).

Of course, everybody should be afraid, but that's normal. That will stop them from doing anything. I too would be afraid if someone threatened me with a weapon. You just don't fool around with that. (Diane).

What about those offences where there actually was physical violence?

While it is true that physical violence was not anticipated in all cases, the subjects in this study said that they did not intend to hurt their victim. Their accounts of the events merely indicate negligence or carelessness. In this respect, while it is possible to establish a relationship between the quality of planning done prior to an offence and the acts of violence committed, it also seems that the offenders' experience plays an important role; there was more violence in those cases where the offenders were inexperienced. Inexperience, however, does not account for all the violence committed, because in half of these cases the accomplices were experienced.

While the choice of accomplices is an important factor in ensuring a good execution of the criminal operation, the respondents show that in several cases there was little discrimination in their choices. So they worked both with relatively unknown accomplices as well as with some who had a reputation for violence:

...He becomes very violent if he is opposed. (Claire).

I knew that he had a reputation for being quite violent. (Manon).

Before the job, my partner said that if he had any problems he would liquidate her. I didn't take him seriously. I didn't believe him... He could be violent. In the past, he had tried to strangle his mother. Hence his reputation. He had many scars on his back. He said that they were due to knife wounds. (Rolande).

Thus, it is not surprising that they ran into unexpected problems, particularly during crimes where the woman did not even bother to check who would be present at the designated place, either because of a lack of precaution or simply because she did not worry about it. This gives rise to the following scenario:

Since we knew that the telephone line had been cut, we decided that we would knock it (the door) down, even if that made a lot of noise. The guys broke it down and then someone began screaming and yelling on the second floor. (Fiona).

Most of the respondents did not think of the possible risks, other than getting arrested. Thus, they were little prepared for possible resistance by the victim,⁽⁷⁾ or to an apparently unjustified violence initiated by their accomplices⁽³⁾:

I don't know why the guys attacked him...I will have to learn once and for all.
(Rolande).

When faced with the unexpected, some decide to escape. This is what Jocelyne did. Others, who had a violent past, put on a show of bravado and overwhelming power:

All that mattered was anger and immense aggressiveness. This feeling of letting it all out was fantastic. I had accumulated so much of it...I felt powerful and hateful toward everybody. (Manon).

Under other circumstances, the danger experienced by a lover who was attacked was enough for the woman to go to his aid. This usually took place in a tense and excited atmosphere:

...my friend got up and began scuffling with another guy. I did not know what was happening. I heard them scream. Then two, three other guys came and jumped on my friend to beat him up. I yelled at them to stop. I said to the guy beside me with whom I was talking to do something. I was afraid that they were going to hurt him. (Claudine).

Therefore, without time to reflect, they may have committed an act in self-defence which in the end may have turned out badly:

I thought of my weapon and without thinking about it too much I pulled it out of my purse and fired right in front me towards the floor. I only wanted to make an impression so that everybody would stop fighting. When I fired there was nobody in front of me, but just at that moment a guy I knew layed on the floor. He was not getting up. He had been hit by the bullet. (Claudine).

Often, the amount of violence used was more than would have been necessary to ensure safety or to beat a retreat:

He was beaten severely without any shooting. He was not badly beaten, though. When he did not move we ran away quickly... (Elisabeth).

All at once both of them were on top of him, kicking and punching him... (Rolande).

In some cases, the presence of a weapon aggravated the violence committed.

3. Aftermath

Most of the women were arrested immediately after the offence because of a witness, a hidden alarm or after a short chase. Those who were not arrested immediately went to one of their accomplices, either in a bar or club to

divide the spoils. These were relatively modest: usually a few hundred dollars. For two women, the earnings were a mere twenty or thirty dollars.

While half of the respondents keep this money to pay for their daily expenses, the others immediately rewarded themselves and squandered their money on a big bash. Those who did not expect to divide the booty before the offence now regreted it, especially if they had committed the offence with their lover:

He gave me one hundred dollars and said that I had done nothing, then he left. It was not at all what I had expected... I was disappointed in his reaction. (Claire).

While the arrest of two women was not surprising because they had made very flagrant mistakes (dropping a purse on the scene of the crime, for example), for the others it was a surprise. In these cases the respondents maintain, with evidence, that someone reported them. Denouncement sometimes may have been due to their talkativeness with persons who might have benefited from their lack of discretion:

Several people knew or suspected that it had been me because someone had said that we were thinking of pulling a job...I am sure that I was reported by someone who knew that it was me...and that giving this information earned him an early release. I have an idea as to who it is, but I can't talk about it. (Sylvie).

Once arrested, the women faced a whole series of penal consequences. Their views on this deserve some attention.

D. PENAL CONSEQUENCES

1. Contact with police officers

Except for three subjects, contact with the criminal justice system had been established over the years. In fact, most of the women in this sample became familiar with police facilities two or six years after their first offence. Some respondents (3) served three to six sentences in prison for various offences including robbery. Therefore, for the majority, this contact with the police was nothing new.

The accounts of their pursuit and their arrest sometimes have something of the detective novel in them: "police chase" in the streets, intervention of the "S.W.A.T." team, etc. And although they did not resist arrest, they said that this did not guarantee that their persons and rights would be respected:

Throughout this story, it is really the police that left the biggest mark on me.
(Fiona).

They complained of police officers who were in no hurry to let them get in touch with their lawyer or explain their rights to them:

They presented me with a statement to sign. Since I had never done that before, I did not know that I did not have to sign....It was wrong of them not to tell me more that that about my rights. (Claire).

They complained of long interrogations (9), verbal insults (6), sexual harassment (1), and playing on their fears and sense of guilt:

In front of her (my mother), they accused me of murder and tried to make me feel guilty of having done it and of having caused so much anguish to my mother, who was such a good woman. (Sylvie).

Either because they had difficulty handling the pressure or because they were confronted with overwhelming evidence, one-third of the women agreed to sign an incriminating statement at the time of their arrest.

What they found detestable in police officers does not seem to have any relationship to the type of offence committed. Some women reported violent behaviour against them, whether they committed a burglary, a robbery, or vagrancy:

In the past, I have been arrested because I was found drunk in a park. When the police picked me up, they threw me to the ground and tore all my clothes. (Fiona).

They showed me some photographs and asked me if I knew the person, and although I did not know the person they took me to the police station and two or three of them began to beat me. (Claudine).

Some of the women admitted that they may have provoked the police:

I did not refrain from answering them. I called them names. That must not have helped. Perhaps I provoked them. (Stéphanie).

When I drank I hated everybody, including the police. Rather than mind my own business, I would throw insults at them as soon as I saw them. I would yell at them on the street. This, of course, did not endear me to them. (Armande).

Defleur (1975) has already pointed out the elements that may influence the decisions and attitudes of police officers with respect to drug related offences. These same elements: cooperation, politeness, absence or presence of resistance, and conformity to a stereotype, also seem to affect the attitude of police officers when dealing with offences that are different from those discussed in the Defleur study.

2. The trial

Two women in this sample were free on bail while they were waiting for their trial. The waiting period between the arrest and the sentence was a difficult one except for some hardened offenders who took their predicament in stride:

It was depressing waiting for the sentence, but I am not a restless type. And as you know, one tends to get used to legal procedures. (Armande).

During this period, they lived in a state of total apprehension: constant postponement of proceedings in order to appear before a clement judge, separation of their case from that of their accomplices, and the hope that public opinion would calm down. In cases where the offence was aggravated on the scene of the crime, they feared that the consequences may well involve more severe penalties.

Boredom, idleness, and anguish led a small number of them to contemplate suicide. Some took medications to calm themselves, others felt depressed.

I was not depressed but I was not eating.
While waiting for my sentence I lost about
twenty or thirty pounds. (Sylvie).

For some, life as a prisoner can be very painful, as
indicated by the testimony of one respondent:

The girls called me all sorts of names....
They beat me, and burned my clothes in
bleach. Then I was placed under protection
because it was too dangerous for me.
(Jeannette).

It is useful to note that throughout this waiting
period, all but three respondents received support and
encouragement from their families. Sometimes they received
financial aid to help pay for an experienced lawyer. Those
whose lovers were free said that they preferred their com-
pany to that of their family which tended to be more
moralizing and less informed as to legal procedures.

For a variety of reasons, including the lack of
evidence, the respondents say that they faced less serious
charges than what they had been initially accused with. For
example, three involuntary manslaughters had been initially
introduced as first-degree murders. The respondents, there-
fore, were willing to plead guilty to a lesser offence. Two
women in this study refused such bargaining. But all chose
trial without jury.

2.1 Sentence

At least ten of the thirteen women whose offence was
committed with a male accomplice received a lighter sentence

receive less severe sentences, a phenomenon that the authors attributed to the more submissive and passive nature of women, the less dangerous nature of their delinquency, and their better disposition toward rehabilitation. Nothing in our data leads us to disagree with these conclusions.

...I played the part of a women who was alone, depressed, a single-mother, and divorced. I stuck with this story, and the police as well as the judge believed me. (Gilberte).

Before the judge and the police, I presented myself as a weak woman, crying and repentent, who had never had a choice. The comedy was partly true. I asked their clemency crying, and the judge agreed to give me another chance. (Charlotte).

How was the sentence received by the subjects once it was pronounced? The opinions are evenly split between those who agreed with it and those who disagreed.

If I had been given ten years, I would have had to accept them because of the risks that I took. (Fiona).

I found it stiff because it meant that I was paying for the others. (Danielle).

Also, the thought that it might be possible to be let out on parole after serving one third of the sentence was encouraging to some of them.

3. Perception of their incarceration

Throughout their imprisonment, most of our subjects saw prison as a place of repression and not as a place favorable to reflection.

From the beginning, they were subjected to the clinical intrusions of the staff. While most of them were prepared

to "do their time" in peace and finally stop talking about their offence, they were put back on the stand by social workers and staff, evaluating each lesson that they may have learned. Most did not see staff members (both when on parole and in detention) as possible helpers, but rather as representatives of the authorities who could not be trusted and who began to judge them negatively as soon as they arrived:

As soon as you enter Tanguay, to the director of security you are only a drug addict, and you are always a criminal and an addict, even if you have never been reported using drugs. (Claudine).

In spite of that, our respondents quickly realized that it was the staff and the social workers who distributed privileges and enabled them to obtain a parole, the ultimate objective of all prisoners: "I quickly calculated my date of release and then I lived only for that." (Jeannette). Bearing all this in mind, the great majority of the respondents did make an effort to maintain, or at least pretended to maintain good contact with the personnel and to meet the clinical expectations of the staff and social workers by simulating, in varying degrees, regret and repentance for the crime committed:

They are only interested in seeing if I regretted my act, if I feel guilty. If I don't play the game, I will pass for a callous person and I will not be released for a long time. I have only about one year to go and it may be longer if I am not careful. (Manon).

Almost none of the respondents were interested in making the changes proposed by the personnel because they did not see the need for them. For example, the women believed that their offence occurred under extenuating circumstances, and felt that they were different from the rest of the prisoners, therefore they were not interested in the suggestions made by the personnel. At the same time they deplored the fact that the personnel did not take this difference into account and continued to treat them unfairly:

...It is not through short meetings with social workers that we will change our way of life. It's not as if I were a delinquent. I have never committed an offence, I was only in the company of delinquents... (Claudine).

What did I find the hardest? ... being treated like a criminal by the staff. (Danielle).

Some of them watched the efforts by the social workers to steer them into the "right path" and noted with amusement and irony the limited effectiveness of their efforts:

The social worker is a bit discouraged to see me come and go all the time, her efforts to rehabilitate me are not very successful. (Armande).

In addition to not believing in rehabilitation while in an institution, the subjects maintain that prison did not even offer them the possibility to prepare for another way of life.

First, there is nothing to do in prison: no activities, no spare time, no vocational training that might have improved their chances of obtaining a job once released, and

few opportunities for employment. Only the women who were in prison at Gomin mentioned that, thanks to this "small prison's" difficulty in offering them adequate employment programs, they considered themselves fortunate to have the opportunity to work outside the institution.

The few women who would have really liked to develop a special relationship with the staff were strongly discouraged to do so by the unspoken rules among the prisoners which could result in serious trouble. Thus, they did not have the possibility of exploring new personal interests because they could not associate with other prisoners. Therefore, conversation was often limited to their personal problems or delinquency.

Moreover, the lack of support, promiscuity and competition that govern relations between prisoners could get them into trouble at any time. These may provoke or cause conflicts which they could hardly ignore if they wanted to avoid later problems and be respected:

There is a girl who really gets on my nerves. I warned the guards that I would not stand her for more than a week, after which I would smash her against the wall... (Rolande).

Even if most of the women were to succeed in developing a special relationship with another prisoner to satisfy their emotional needs, they still suffered from a great lack of affection, loneliness due to separation from their children, lack of love, and fear that they would be

"cheated" on or left by their lovers. Together with other frustrations, these emotional needs and fears made many of them depressed:

Once in the cafeteria...I broke down; I
began to cry to scream...I had had enough.
(Gabrielle).

In some cases (2), this led to attempts at suicide. They fought these feelings with a heavy use of mood modifiers which were as easily accessible as outside.

In spite of their frustrations, most were able to maintain very acceptable behaviour and thus obtained their full probation after they had completed one third to one half of their sentence. Only a minority experienced repeated troubles having to do with their aggressiveness, rebelliousness, and their abuse of privileges:

I am negative here. I don't know why. I
am not interested in improving myself
because this is not where I belong.
(Rolande.)

The few details that we have given here do not fully describe the level of dissatisfaction felt by the respondents with respect to their incarceration. However, they clearly illustrate their negative perception of their stay in prison, as well as of the whole series of police and judicial procedures. Does this mean aggressiveness and indifference towards others, as some of them have said? And does imprisonment only enable them to better understand a previously imprisoned lover, as described by Claudine?

To answer this question, let us consider the effect of their contact with the penal system on their perception of their own criminality and delinquent orientation.

4. Apparent effect of penal consequences

Given all these sufferings and problems, how do our respondents perceive their delinquency against the person?

The great majority of our subjects do not view their present offence altogether negatively. They tend to refuse to accept blame for it for various reasons. Those who mainly committed robberies assume a stance of bravado and self-assertion. Those who are less experienced tend to view their offence as an accident or as something due to factors external to them:

I don't lose any sleep over the act that I committed because as far as I am concerned, it was an accident. Of course, someone died. But it was also his fault.... I can't do anything about it. It's done. And then, I have had my full share of suffering because of this accident. (Danielle).

They portray themselves as tossed about in a world of hard knocks. A minority among them have no explanation to offer. They do not understand why they have ended up like this and are still searching for a real answer:

I cannot accept the answers given by the staff to explain what I did. I am still looking for an answer, even though the social worker told me that there was none....I do not understand my action. I did not have a difficult childhood. There is nothing in my past that could explain it. (Jeannette).

During the interview, the respondents for the most part tried to forget the offence because they were tired of having had to relive the details of the crime between the accusation and their sentencing, and also because it made them very uncomfortable. Some mothers find it difficult to face up to reality:

I will take back my children later....They will have a lot of questions. I want to be able to give them some answers and feel good inside. (Jocelyne).

These few women are the only ones who, while in prison undertook a deep self-analysis and a therapeutic program with the assistance of the staff.

While an in-depth questioning was not undertaken by all the subjects, some do admit that their stay in prison was a watershed in their lives:

Perhaps some good may come out of it. Perhaps I was off to a bad start, who knows? (Rolande).

It is mainly the prison (rather than the arrest or the legal procedures) which changes you because it involves a change in environment. (Gabrielle).

For those respondents who are more familiar with penal institutions, it is difficult to say whether this sentence will have a dissuasive effect:

The fact that there is a risk of going back in certainly affects you when you are out. But once you are back to your old way of life, these risks worry you much less. You have to live with a habit. I would even say that you are hardened because you know that inside it is not that bad and that someday you will get out and even be richer if your job (offence) was successful. (Rita).

For others, the shock of imprisonment makes them promise to themselves that they will never set foot inside a prison again...unless by accident:

I will respect the law. It would really take another accident for me to return there. (Danielle).

E. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Few of the women are able to formulate definite plans for the future. They find it difficult to decide what to do in order to avoid repetition of past mistakes. They also remain emotionally fragile:

If my date of release were to be rescinded, my love for my family would not be enough to keep my going. (Jeannette).

I have been depressed for years and I want to die. I would be happy if someone were to kill me....It would be a deliverance. I am tired of living.... (Charlotte).

Those who have more personal resources and consider their offence as accidental do not contemplate changing their circle of friends or pace of life:

I will rehabilitate myself and will not go back to a life of crime. But seeing my old friends has nothing to do with that. (Rita).

According to this group of women, it is a matter of knowing how to control their drinking and knowing when to stop arguing. They appreciate their friends and the type of life they lead and are not attracted to "straight" people.

This opinion is not shared by the majority of women, who consider that they must break with their old environment and their friends to begin a new life. This alternative demands a large reserve of internal strength. In fact, these women are without an occupation, without friends, without hobbies, and sometimes have a lover who is not supportive of her efforts. What they are attempting involves an enormous change:

It is difficult to make a new friends. I still know only people from my old circles, whom I cannot see without risking falling back. On the other hand, the normal world is not really interested in getting to know someone with my background. The prejudices are strong. (Charlotte).

Several of them plan to return to school (6) to obtain better qualifications and increase their chances of getting an interesting job. Others would like to become hair-dressers, beauticians or secretaries. However, few of them have concrete plans to do this, whether they are in prison or on parole. As far as they are concerned, there is no hurry. Once released, they wait for a job that they would like and expect that it will make itself available (they do not look for it), while at the same time they draw welfare benefits.

Thus, of the women who were on parole at the time of the interview, only two had a job and one is attending school, hoping thus to obtain more stable employment:

Before, I used to say that people who worked were different. Now I understand them better. By working they stay away from trouble and live a well-ordered and quiet life. At the present time, I need the financial security that a stable salary provides, even if it is not very much. (Sylvie).

The other eight women who were released are on welfare. We should point out that one of them, feeling a greater need to be useful and to maintain some contact with her circle, has undertaken to work as a volunteer with women in difficulty:

I am tired of living but I don't want to die. What keeps me going is my hope and my volunteer work with girls who are still involved with drugs and crime. I work with an agency assisting delinquents. As soon as a girl needs help so as not to fall back on drugs or something else, she can call me and I go and see her where she is. It is important for me to feel that I can do something, that I am not useless. If I didn't have this, I would have nothing worth living for. (Charlotte).

The economic problem comes through loud and clear; it underlies all their other activities. In spite its overwhelming importance, the respondents are often poorly prepared to deal with it, hence their sense of failure or dependence on those around them.

A study such as this makes it possible to show that, after several years, the dreams held during adolescence (prince charming, model family, rich spouse, etc.) take on a

different appearance in adulthood. The respondents would like to have a well-paying and interesting job, and a fulfilling life. But they are still struggling with an incomplete education, little regular work experience, a lack of support from their circle, while at the same time they are asked to take care of themselves, to be independent, good mothers, resourceful, honest citizens, etc. The task may be too difficult and failure quite probable. Consequently they may see themselves as good for nothing. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to distinguish the problems related to delinquency from the problems connected with the condition of these women. In fact, these are just more problems that are added on to other difficulties that a good number of women are already experiencing because they are women (unemployment, low income, responsibility for the family, social isolation, etc.).

CONCLUSION

The aim in this study has been mainly to describe a process which sheds light on a very specific category of female offenders: those who commit major violent offences.

To do this, interviews were held with nineteen women accused and found guilty of violent offences. Those interviews enabled us to collect factual data as well as more general impressions, perceptions and attitudes. While it is true that the number of women involved in this type of delinquency is small, it is nevertheless important to answer a number of questions concerning their involvement. In this case, the exceptional nature of their behavior is also an indicator which may shed light on female delinquency as a whole.

The retrospective approach adopted here does, of course, have some inevitable drawbacks: selective memory, rationalization of events and self-serving reconstruction of events. However, it also has some advantages: it offers an overall picture, an articulation of habits, models, networks which may help explain behavior, and introspective on the part of the subjects which sheds light on persons and events that had a determining role.

The analysis of the comments made by the women interviewed for this study cannot, of course, be generalized. In fact, this data should not be seen as something it is not. Its limitations are twofold. On the one hand, the sample consists of only nineteen persons who were not chosen at random. They were women who agreed to participate in this

study and therefore they do not necessarily represent a probabilistic sample. On the other hand, the very definition of the offences chosen affected the choice of the candidates. Violence may manifest itself in an assault a homicide, a robbery, or a murder, and it is not expressed in the same way throughout society. In some families and in some levels of society, the use of daily physical violence may not necessarily constitute a serious problem. It may simply upset an environment in which people have learned to control or express their emotions in a particular way. Therefore, when we look at this type of offence, we must realize that these persons interviewed belong to a particular environment, although there may be some exceptions.

Moreover, far be it for us to make the simplistic assertion that the environment is entirely responsible for behavior. In fact, the data reported here clearly show that violent offences are not due to chance. While not denying the possibility that a person unconnected with the delinquent world may suddenly decide to commit a violent offence, we must also state that no such exceptional cases appear in our study.

Conversely, it would also be an exaggeration to speak of criminal careers as used to describe some types of male delinquent behavior such as professionalization or specialization. In fact, the data presented in this study do not substantiate this hypothesis. On the other hand, if by

criminal career we mean a broader lifestyle associated with offences, then the term could apply to some women in this study.

Given these two extremes, what is the portrait that emerges from the interviews held with the women who committed at least one violent offence?

While it was not possible to trace their recollections back to their childhood, the early teens constitute good indicators. For a large number of subjects, the transition from an elementary school environment to secondary school marked the beginning of disinterest in everything having to do with academic learning. School was still interesting, but mainly as a social setting. It offered an opportunity to meet friends and to engage in extra-curricular activities.

This educational transition is accompanied by a deep desire for freedom expressed mainly within the family, which itself does not always offer the necessary support for harmonious development. Of course, it would be simplistic to blame the parents, or the parent, and to make them responsible for all the difficulties experienced by their children. Although this is not to say that nothing needs to be done with respect to the family.

Some families experience complex problems having to do with an adverse economic situation, illness, the lack of an elementary knowledge of parental duties, anti-conformist values and a deep denial of children. Few families experi-

ence all these handicaps simultaneously. Nevertheless a large number of the women interviewed come from families who lived in difficult conditions. In some cases, the children had to be "placed" with someone else, and in other cases the children learned to live in an environment that was not very favorable to their development. This situation foreshadowed problems of social adaptation, and certainly left its marks.

Nor are parents who experience difficulties with small children any better prepared to deal with teenagers. In fact, the opposite is true. They are simply not prepared to deal with school absenteeism, association with questionable friends, running away, and the use of drugs and other substances. They react either with too much severity or with too much leniency, or they do not react at all, thus indicating that they are not interested in such problems.

Adolescents continue to be involved in activities that are incompatible with training for the working world and an adequate socialization with friends their own age. Gradually they move to the fringe. The exciting life offered by their own circle as well as the sense of worth that comes from belonging to a group on the move are just some aspects that may encourage the individual teenager to move in this direction. With time, their circle becomes more imposing because it may offer an escape through the use of drugs, opportunities to earn money easily to meet their ever growing financial needs, and an adaptation to a life-

style geared to delinquency. All of these minimize the attraction of a more conventional way of life. Moreover, for some women, an unplanned early pregnancy adds another very important dimension to their difficulties.

Solicited and encouraged by their circle to participate in offences, they find it difficult to resist. Moreover, for some, committing an offence or a fraud is something interesting to do. Very few women participated in violent offences on a regular basis. Generally speaking, the women in this sample, like those in the crime statistics, have concentrated their energies on minor thefts, drug trafficking, and prostitution. While some of them occasionally concentrated on robberies, these still constituted a minority of all their criminal acts.

The circles that they frequent are largely dominated by men, and very often limit them to accessory roles. While they may act as accomplices, they do not always have a right to their share of the earnings because they are used as screens or decoys to outwit potential victims. Moreover, they sometimes feel "obligated" to overcome their hesitations and agree to act as accomplices in order to preserve emotional ties with members that they care about. While over the years some of the women in this study have acquired some experience enabling them to be more independent with respect to their male companions, they are still clear minority compared to the rest. Thus, our analysis of the

comments made by the women interviewed shows that they play a secondary role in the criminal world, even when they were involved in one or more violent offences.

Moreover, most of them come from economically and socially underprivileged strata. In fact, the financial problems and their related consequences very often are accompanied by what one might call problems originating in the social fibre. The women, their natural families, and the families they set up, often suffer from such social isolation that they no longer know whom to turn to for advice and what services are available to them. The contacts that they have had in the past may well have been related to custody arrangements. Consequently, a sense of distrust prevents them from turning to social and other types of service.

Therefore, our analysis of the interviews suggests that the women in question live in difficult economic and social conditions, and play a secondary role or have an inferior status in the criminal world. In addition to this, they must deal with their status as women: they are poorly prepared for the labour market, are poor and often the head of the household.

Also, female offenders who experienced imprisonment did not come out any better prepared for the working world. In

their case, fundamental attitudes such as self-confidence independence, appreciation for work, and making good use of spare time were never developed.

These aspects do not explain or excuse their delinquency. However, they should be taken into account in order to realize that the choices available to some of them are more limited than others. In fact, little or no preventive action is taken until their behavior receives some attention by the penal system. What support, we may ask, is given to families that might be identified as families at risk? What follow-up is there of a girl who drops out of school? What training and preparation for the working world is made available to her so that she may have access to better paying jobs?

The female offenders who committed one or more violent offences for the most part present little risk to society. Therefore, might they not benefit from frequent leaves so as to take advantages of services offered by the community and thus get accustomed to frequently community organizations? These contacts would have the twofold advantage of enabling society to come to know female offenders better, to encouraging society to no longer see them as people apart and, by their greater acceptance, to facilitate their reintegration in society.

The data also shows that these women are pushed to the fringe of society in two ways: first as offenders against society, and then as offenders in a criminal world dominated by men.

While their acts deserve to be sanctioned, these women should still be given the opportunity to develop their positive qualities and to concentrate on their potential as women.

They need to fulfill themselves in some activity, to draw some self-worth and to feel that they are somebody. They must be supported so that they can learn to function in socially acceptable ways, and feel a common bond with a society from which they now feel very separated.

In this respect, some of the problems that they encounter are not all different from the problems faced by women in general. Why not help improve their lot and thus promote some solidarity among them?

This study has shown that, in general, women who are involved in a violent offence live in a criminogenic environment, but that they are not involved in this type of activity on a daily basis. In retrospect, this study also convincingly shows that their choices are very limited from the outset because of handicaps inherent in their social and economic condition, and because the directions that they took in their early teens imprison them in a way of life from which it is difficult to escape.

APPENDIX

Interview Questionnaire

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. FAMILY OF ORIGIN

- 1.1 Number and sex of children
- 1.2 When you lived in your parents' home, what was the main occupation of:
 - your father?
 - your mother?
- 1.3 What was your family's financial situation?
- 1.4 How would you describe the relations between the members of your family? What sort of life did you lead?
- 1.5 How did you parents react when they were unhappy with your behavior?
- 1.6 When something was not to your liking, what did you do?
- 1.7 Did one or more of the members of your family:
 - use alcohol? How often?
 - use drugs? What kind and how often?
 - have dealings with the police or the legal system? and for what reasons?
- 1.8 What sort of life do your brothers, sisters, and parents live now?
- 1.9 Were you ever placed in one or more foster families?
 - If yes, when and for how long?
 - Reason(s) for being placed in a foster family?
 - How did you feel there?

1.10 Did you ever run away while you were living with your parents or in a foster family?

- If yes, why and how did you come back?

(for example: brought back by the police).

1.11 How old were you when you left your parents' home?

1.12 Why did you leave and where did you go?

2.0 ACTIVITIES DURING ADOLESCENCE

2.1 How much education do you have?

2.2 Why did you quit school?

2.3 What was your parents' reaction?

2.4 How did you behave in school?

- If you had difficulties at school, what do you think was the reason?

2.5 Did you play hooky at school?

- If yes, when and with whom?

2.6 What did you like doing as a teenager? What activities did you like best?

- Did you participate in sports or cultural activities?

2.7 When you were a teenager what did you want to do when you grew up?

2.8 Did you "hang around" with a particular group of friends?

- If yes, why did you meet as a group?

- What role did you play in that group?

- Did you commit any offences together?

(vandalism, thefts,...)

2.9 Were you ever involved in a fight?

- If yes, could you tell me about a fight that you can remember?

2.10 Did you use alcohol or drugs?

2.11 Under what circumstances did you begin using them?

2.12 How did their use change with time?

2.13 How did you pay for your drugs?

- Did you ever sell them?

2.14 How did you feel when you were under the effect of drugs or alcohol? Was your personality different compared to when you were sober?

2.15 Have you tried to stop using them?

- With what result?

3.0 JUVENILE AND ADULT DELINQUENCY

3.1 What was the first act that you committed for which you could have been arrested?

3.2 At what age and for what offence did the police arrest you for the first time? How did they treat you?

3.4 What type of offences have you committed since your childhood?

(thefts, frauds, vandalism, selling drugs, armed robbery,...)

3.5 Could you tell me something about the various offences that you committed since you were young (both known and unknown to the police), as well as the circumstances surrounding the offence that

justified your inclusion in this interview. If applicable, make reference to the following aspects:

- A) Your age and the nature of the offence?
- B) How did the idea come to you?
- C) How did you decide on the victim or place where you would commit it?
- D) With whom did you commit this act? How were your accomplices chosen?
- E) What preparations did you make for it?
- F) What role did you play in this act?
- G) Why did you participate?
- H) How afraid were you of getting arrested?
- I) How did you feel before committing the offence?
- J) Did you expect to resort to violence if necessary or did you think that there was a possible risk of violence?
- K) Did you use drugs or alcohol before committing the offence? Did your accomplices use them? For what reason?
- L) Did anyone carry a weapon?
 - What kind of weapon? Loaded or unloaded?
 - How had that person obtained it?
 - Why did he (she) carry it?
 - How was it used?

- What did you think of the fact that someone had a weapon when this offence was being committed?
- Have you ever personally used a weapon?
Under what circumstances?
- Do you regularly carry a weapon with you?
- M) Was anyone wounded or was there any violence in any of these acts?
 - How did you react when faced with this violence?
 - How did you feel toward the victim?
 - What did you think would be the consequences for the victim?
- N) What did you feel during and after the offence?
 - Were those feelings the same for each offence?
 - Over time, have you noticed any change in your emotions?
- O) What did you do during the few hours immediately after the offence?
- P) How did you spend the earnings from the offence?
- Q) If you were arrested for this act:
 - How much later were you arrested?
 - What did you do in the meantime?
 - How did the police find you?
- R) Were you taken to court for this act?

- S) How was your lawyer chosen?
- T) What were the initial charges against you and for what charges were you finally sentenced?
 - To what type of court procedure were you subjected? (trial by judge alone, trial by jury, preliminary inquiry,...)?
 - Did anyone encourage you or suggest to you to plead guilty to a lesser offence?
- U) What sentence did you receive?
 - What did you think of the sentence?
- V) What do you think of that act now?
- W) If you were intoxicated when the act was committed, do you think the things would have turned out differently had you been sober?
- 3.6 How did your relatives react to your delinquency?
- 3.7 How would you describe the environment in which you lived when you were very active in the perpetration of the offence that you just described?
 - How did you see yourself?
- 3.8 In what other occupations or activities were you involved at that time?
- 3.9 Could you describe a typical day for me?
- 3.10 Do you have any friends who have run up against the police or the legal system?
- 3.11 Do you think that the people with whom you associated were real friends?

3.12 During the years that you were free, was there ever a period of time during which you were not involved in delinquent activities? If yes, when and why?

3.13 Have you given any serious thought to ceasing to commit these offences?

3.14 Do you believe that there were circumstances or persons that particularly influenced your behaviour so as to make you commit these acts or change your behavior?

4.0 TIME SPENT IN JUVENILE AND ADULT INSTITUTIONAL

Could you tell me something of your stay in group homes or in prison, making specific reference to the following:

4.1 At what age and in what institution?

4.2 Duration and reasons for being committed in such an institution?

4.3 How did you find this period of confinement? What did you think of it?

4.4 What was easiest and most difficult about it?

4.5 Did you learn anything from it?

4.6 What influence did that confinement have on you?

4.7 Was there a social worker who proved to be of particular assistance?

4.8 What contacts did you maintain with the outside?

- 4.9 At the time of your release, did your return to the same environment, to the same people with whom you associated before you incarceration?

5.0 RELATIONS AS A COUPLE

- 5.1 What is your current marital status?
- 5.2 Could you tell me something about your most recent relationship or of the one that affected you most?
- Your age and occupation and those of your companion and length of relationship.
- 5.3 Did you have any children by him (if your companion was a man)?
- 5.4 What role did each one of you play as a couple?
- 5.5 How would you describe your relationship?
- 5.6 Did he/she use drugs or alcohol? (how often? did he/she sell any of these?)
- 5.7 Had your companion already had run ins with the legal system and/or the police?
- 5.8 Did you commit any offences while you were living in this relationship?
- Did you commit them together?
 - If not, what did he/she think of your acts?
- 5.9 Did the fact that he/she did or did not bring in money at home influence your actions?
- 5.10 What role did your spouse play in the decision to continue or reduce the number of your offences?
- 5.11 Were your earlier relationships as a couple similar to the present one?

5.12 Have you had any children by any other man?

5.13 Do they live with you, or do you intend to raise them yourselves?

6.0 EMPLOYMENT

6.1 What are the main jobs that you have held?
(type, duration, reasons for leaving, age)

6.2 Rather than trying to make money through illegal means, why are you not seeking stable employment?

6.3 What do you think of people who work at a regular job?

6.4 Did the question of employment ever play a role in your decision to continue or reduce you illegal activities? Could it do so in the future?

6.5 Have you already committed any offences (eg. theft) at work?

6.6 Are you assisting anyone financially other than your children?

7.0 REFLECTIONS ON LIFE AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

7.1 Do you think that your involvement in future offences is a distinct probability?

- Why?

7.2 What does violence mean to you?

7.3 What do you think of the life that you have led until now?

7.4 Have you already tried to end your life or experienced depression?

7.5 What are your plans for the future?

7.6 What circumstances or persons could help determine the success or failure of these plans?

7.7 Do you think that you need psychological or other type of assistance to help you come out of this?

7.8 To what extent do the following seem important to you?

	Very	Average	Little
- Have stable employment			
- Live a life as a couple or improve the way you are living now			
- Have children or take care of the ones you already have			
- Have better housing			
- Improve your standard of living			
- Devoting yourself completely to your family			
- Make friends or improve your relations with them			
- Take care of yourself			
- Complete your education			

7.9 Can you think of any women who might be interested in being interviewed?

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